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23 JUNE 1987



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THE DECISIVE YEARS:

MEMOIRS OF VIETNAMESE SENIOR GENERAL HOANG VAN THAI

23 JUNE 1987

EAST ASIA
SOUTHEAST ASIA

THE DECISIVE YEARS:
MEMOIRS OF VIETNAMESE SENIOR GENERAL HOANG VAN THAI

Ho Chi Minh City SAIGON GIAI PHONG in Vietnamese 13 Mar-14 May 86 p 3

[Book by Sen Gen Hoang Van Thai: "The Decisive Years"]

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[13 Mar 86]

Introduction

[Text] Dear Readers,

The great victory of the spring of 1975 concluded our people's long resistance war against the U.S.-imperialist aggressors.

After U.S. troops were sent to the South, at the beginning of 1966, I was sent south to disseminate the resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee in Military Region 5 and the Central Highlands theater. Then, in accordance with a decision by the Political Bureau, I remained there to participate in guiding the B1 (Military Region 5) theater. In October 1967 I was sent to work with the Central Office of South Vietnam [COSVN] in guiding the B2 (Nam Bo) theater. After the Paris Agreement was signed I, along with my colleagues in the B2 theater, went north to report on the situation and participate in the 21st Plenum of the Party Central Committee, after which I remained in the north to work at the General Staff until the South was completely liberated.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Great-Victory Spring, the People's Army Publishing House, implementing a resolution of the Political Bureau on organizing the major anniversaries during the 1984-1985 2-year period, requested me to write these memoirs. By means of this book I would like to introduce to readers the activities of the Political Bureau, the Central Committee, the Party Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, and the strategic staff organs of the party during the last years of the war, from 1973 to 1975. I hope that this book will help its readers more clearly realize our party's strategic skill in the phase which decided the final victory of the enterprise of national liberation.

The outstanding development of the party's war guidance art in the 1973-1975 period was one of the decisive factors which led to the Great-Victory Spring.

After the Paris Agreement was signed, in view of the plots and acts of the United States and its lackeys, which openly and brazenly sabotaged the agreement, our party analyzed the situation in an objective, scientific manner in order to correctly determine the path of advance of the revolution in the South. Throughout the 1973-1974 2-year period our party led the army and people in both resolutely defeating the U.S. puppet pacification and encroachment plan and resolutely creating a new status and a new strength which were increasingly advantageous to us, in the great rear area in the North, on the strategic transportation route, and especially on the great front line in the South. With the new status and strength that had been prepared to await a strategic opportunity, at the beginning of the 1974-1975 dry season the party very adroitly discovered that a new factor had appeared on the battlefield and affirmed that the strategic opportunity was ripe. It therefore promptly made an accurate strategic decision and boldly accelerated the formation of a high tide of general offensive on all battlefields in the South. During the spring of 1975, especially after the Buon Ma Thuot victory, in a common strategic situation that was developing in an increasingly advantageous manner, our party continually supplemented its strategic decision to win the greatest possible victory as rapidly as possible. Fully understanding the decision of the Political Bureau and the Military Party Commission of the Party Central Committee, the leadership and command echelons on the battlefields guided the fighting, the annihilation of the enemy, and the liberation of the localities, while concentrating elite forces and making extremely urgent preparations to strike the final strategic war-deciding blow, liberate Saigon, and completely liberate the South. Under the wise, responsive, and timely collective guidance of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission, the localities, battlefields, and units took the initiative, were creative, rode forward on the crest of victory, and oriented all actions toward the slogan, "miraculous speed, boldness, surprise, and certain victory." With the results of mobilizing the great manpower and materiel resources of the entire nation, by means of three strategic war-deciding blows (the liberation of the Central Highlands, the liberation of Hue-Da Nang, and the liberation of Saigon and the Mekong Delta), our soldiers and people outstandingly fulfilled the 2-year strategic plan within a period of 2 months, won complete victory in the enterprise of liberating the South, and unified the nation.

Because of limited ability and time, and because the book concentrates on the activities of the general headquarters in the phase of concluding the war, it deals in only a general way with activities on the battlefields and other activities on a nationwide scale.

On this occasion, I would like to sincerely thank the war recapitulation and military history research organs at the central level and in Military Region 5, the Southern Military History Department, and many other comrades who provided documents and contributed many valuable opinions in the process of preparing and writing this book.

Also because of limited ability and time, and because the topic, although limited, is still very large, it is certain that the book cannot be free of deficiencies and weaknesses. I eagerly await comments from readers.

31 January 1985
Hoang Van Thai

Chapter One

The Battlefields Were Not Yet Silent

During the final months of 1972, the work atmosphere in COSVN and the Regional Command was truly urgent and tense. We in B2 (1) were continually receiving communiques from the Political Bureau, the Military Commission, and Sau Tho (2) and Xuan Thuy in Paris, informing us of each development in the diplomatic struggle between ourselves and the enemy.

We and the United States agreed on 31 October 1972 to initial an agreement to which the two sides had agreed.

The Political Bureau also directed us with regard to the direction for organizing the four-party and two-party military commissions and reported on the role of the International Commission of Control and Supervision and the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, made up of three equal components, while also giving direction on tasks that had to be carried out and prepared in order to implement the Agreement.

As everyone knows, the U.S. side reneged and refused to sign at the designated time. After Nixon was elected to a second term the United States demanded the amendment of many points of real substance in the agreement to which the two sides had agreed. They continued to demand "the withdrawal of troops to the North."

Clearly, it was necessary to step up military activities in the spirit of the message Ba (3) had sent us in August, not only in order to back up the negotiations but also to create an advantageous position when the Agreement was signed.

In a message sent to COSVN and the Regional Command on 8 November 1972, Van (4) reminded us of the Political Bureau's observation on the two possibilities (the war could continue for years or could conclude at a rather early date). We had to prepare for both of those possibilities.

They had foreseen that sooner or later the U.S. side would have to sign the Agreement, and that under those conditions the most complicated problems would be the ceasefire and determining the two sides' areas of control and procedures for receiving troops. The message also brought our attention to specific matters about which we should think and report for consideration by the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee.

At the end of November 1972 we were monitoring the battlefield and had been informed by the General Staff. It was becoming increasingly clear that during the past 2 months the United States had been trying to strengthen the puppets' forces and was feverishly sending weapons and war equipment to South Vietnam (5). They were providing support so that the puppet troops could step up

their encroachment and terror activities, in order to improve their position. Clearly, the United State was in a situation of having to withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, but wanted to conclude the war from a position of strength and wanted their lackeys to stand firm and become stronger.

A few days later the Political Bureau affirmed that in actuality the United States was plotting to maintain its involvement in a new form and was strengthening the puppet forces so that they could be superior to ours, while endeavoring to weaken our forces. And even before we and the United States had reached accord on the Agreement, the United States had the Thieu administration to prepare to sabotage it.

On 27 November 1972 the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee informed us that it was very possible that the enemy would resume their attacks on the North to an even more serious degree, including the use of B52's to carry out mass attacks on Hanoi and Hai Phong. A week later the Political Bureau directed us that immediate preparations had to be made to cope with the contingency of the United States foolhardily resuming its attacks in the North and the negotiations again being interrupted.

We learned that Sau Tho had returned to Hanoi at about the same time we learned that the United States had sent B52 bombers to bomb the North.

In fact, even then we were very confident that we would win, but were not completely certain what the capabilities of our soldiers and people in the North to counter the enemy's strategic air raids were. A number of propaganda-training cadres were assigned responsibility for monitoring the Voice of Vietnam and news of the fight against the enemy's B52's by our air-defense troops and air force.

During the first 2 days (18 and 19 December) we felt that the broadcasting station was at times experiencing difficulty. Worries we had 25 years ago resurfaced in our minds. Then, at the end of 1947, the enemy used 20,000 troops to attack the Viet Bac base area, in which the Voice of Vietnam radio station was located. Uncle Ho directed the High Command to, by all means, protect the station and ensure that the voice of the resistance war was not interrupted. The Viet Bac campaign concluded victoriously. The broadcasting station personnel ensured the station's continuous activity.

Now, during those memorable final days of 1972, we were very moved when our worry passed and we continued to hear the familiar, clear voice of the announcer coming from Hanoi. "This is the Voice of Vietnam, broadcast from Hanoi, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." The news that on 18 December eight enemy airplanes had been shot down in the skies of the North, including three B52's, two of which had been shot down on the spot, and that seven enemy pilots had been captured alive, moved everyone.

The atmosphere at the Regional Command organ became much more animated. The Superfortresses of the U.S. Air Force had received well-deserved punishment as soon as they penetrated the great rear area. Newspaper articles and photographs attacking the prestige of the U.S. Air Force were posted on the organ's bulletin board.

[14 Mar 86]

[Text] A few days later the U.S. AP news agency admitted that "The number of U.S. pilots who were lost during the first 5 days (between 18 and 22 December) was equal to 13 percent of the total number of pilots now being held in North Vietnam." Then the English news agency Reuters commented: "Military observers in Washington estimate that at the present rate at which B52's are being shot down the United States may run out of them within the next 3 months."

The U.S. side had begun to lower its voice. Nixon had to announce the cessation of bombing, shelling, mining, and the blockade by sea north of the 19th Parallel. Kissinger once again set out for Paris to continue the negotiations, an admission of defeat of the plot to exert the greatest possible pressure against us.

However, considerable difficulties were still being encountered in the diplomatic struggle. After holding a private meeting with Kissinger and the two sides had essentially agreed on a draft agreement, which was to be signed on 23 January 1973, Sau Tho sent a message to Pham Hung and COSVN, informing them that "It is necessary to foresee three major problems arising in implementing the Agreement in the South:

"1. Militarily, the puppets will surely continue to demand "the withdrawal of troops to the North.

"2. Politically, there is the matter of setting up the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord.

"3. The releasing of prisoners captured by the two sides."

We thought about and exchanged opinions about those problems.

During the last months of the year, in accordance with the policy of COSVN, a group consisting of Nguyen Huu Tho, Huynh Tan Phat, Tran Bau Kiem, and myself, along with a number of aides, were responsible for concentrating on studying and preparing to set up the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, and for determining the members of our contingent in the three-party coalition government, in the spirit of the draft agreement agreed to by we and the United States, and estimating which members of the third-force component could cooperate with us. We studied the organization and function of each echelon of the governmental system, in order to maintain and develop the forces of the revolution in the governmental administration and the mass organizations, build up the mass organizations, win over the intermediate component and the progressives to the side of the revolution, and create for us a superiority in the balance of force between ourselves and our adversaries.

During the period before the treaty was signed and in the months to follow, we persistently struggled toward the goal of forming a tripartite coalition government after the United States withdrew its troops. News of the visit to

Vietnam by Chou Enlai demonstrated that China did not support us in negotiating and signing the Agreement and in forming a coalition government.

On the formation of a joint military commission, COSVN exchanged opinions and made recommendations to the Political Bureau. On 9 January comrade Nguyen Duy Trinh, a member of the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee and Minister of Foreign Affairs, sent a message informing us that in the opinion of the Political Bureau the coming struggle could be difficult and complicated. Therefore, COSVN should name Lt Gen Tran Van Tra, in his status of Deputy Commander, to head the delegation of the South to the Four-Party Joint Military Commission. When the two-party military commission was set up he would head the delegation of the liberation armed forces in the South in that commission. Two comrades could go directly from Paris to South Vietnam to assist Tra by serving as deputy heads of the delegation. All necessary organizational matters and the operational guidelines of the delegation were urgently debated, for in only a few more weeks, i.e. on 28 January, our delegation would have to face people whom, we knew in advance, were not of good will.

On the basis of the guidance message from the Political Bureau, in the course of many debates and discussions in COSVN we came to realize that the key problem confronting us was to find a way to end the U.S. involvement: all U.S. and vassal troops had to withdraw from the South. To fulfill that requirement would be to create a basis on which to advance the revolution in the South another step forward.

According to a draft agreement to which we and the United States had agreed, there would continue to exist in the South two administrations, two armies, and two areas of control. For the enemy's part, the puppets had an advantage in that they still controlled the cities and the strategic roads. The United States was still holding on to the Thieu regime to carry out its neocolonialism. We controlled the jungles-and-mountains region and important rural areas, had an extensive political organization among the masses, and had rather strong armed forces which stood their ground in many areas. However, the population of the liberated was not large and the armed forces were not uniformly developed among the various areas. For example, in the Mekong Delta our political and armed forces were rather strong and had moved up close to the enemy positions prior to the signing of the Agreement, but in some areas our armed forces were still weaker than those of the enemy. Many of our troop units had fought continuously since 1972 and had not been consolidated organizationally or supplemented with troops, equipment, and weapons. That comparison of forces shows that although we would have many advantages during the coming struggle we would also have a considerable number of difficulties and the struggle would be very complicated.

We agreed with the opinion expressed by Sau Tho, who in a message sent from Paris on 17 January stated that it was necessary to be on guard against the situation of the war being resumed by the enemy in certain areas, and even spreading. Therefore, in addition to the political, diplomatic, and legal struggles, the struggle for time to consolidate and build forces, especially in the base areas and liberated areas, would be expedited in order to maintain readiness to cope with the contingency of the return of war. In the immediate

future, the enemy could concentrate their forces in launching attacks to gain an advantageous position before the Agreement was signed. Maintaining combat readiness, actively retaliating against the enemy, and maintaining our base areas and liberated areas, as well as making good use of the opportunity and rapidly building and developing the rear services-technical bases were extremely important matters which had to be fully understood down to the basic level.

Thanks to positive preparations to carry out the "opportunity plan of the High Command," during the last days of January 1973, before the Agreement was signed, COSVN and the Regional Command guided the battlefields in wiping out, or forcing the surrender or evacuation of, hundreds of outposts, won control of hundreds of hamlets in a number of advantageous areas, expanded to many important areas, cut and gained control of many segments of strategic roads, and cut off the enemy in many areas that were deeper and larger than the past.

There was happiness in COSVN and the Regional Command at the end of January and the first part of February 1973 over the victory that had been won in Paris: the U.S. side had to sign the Agreement and would have to withdraw all troops from the South of our country. Thus, after more than 100 years, the day was near when there would be no foreign aggressor troops on our soil. That was the happiness of a new spring, of preparing to celebrate Tet before seeing off the delegation headed by Tran Van Tra and entering into a new struggle.

According to information we received, after the Paris Agreement was signed the puppet army and administration were terrified. Because they had been defeated and stalemated in their war of aggression in Vietnam, their U.S. masters had gone over Thieu's head to sign an agreement with us against the wishes of their lackeys.

In many places in which our movement was strong and the enemy troops were vacillating, we relied on the legality of the Agreement, promoted the political struggle and military proselytizing, and won new victories. The thing the Saigon puppets were most unhappy over was that the United States did not "force the withdrawal of northern troops from the South," so the puppet troops would have to singlehandedly cope with our troops on a "leopard skin spots" battlefield with interspersed positions, a situation which Thieu did not want and of which he was very afraid.

But then the United States and its puppets set aside their disagreements to carry out a plot to which they agreed: one hand signed the Agreement while the other hand sabotaged it. Following orders by the Americans, the lackeys in Saigon had prepared in advance, and began to carry out, the Ly Thuong Kiet 1973 plan to send out troops to implement a plan to "grab land" all over the South.

In the B2 theater, the focus of the enemy attacks was the Mekong Delta and the provinces around Saigon. Between the end of January and the first part of March 1973, in the Mekong Delta the enemy spread out their regular troops to coordinate with the regional and popular forces to carry out extremely fierce encroachment, flag-planting, and land grabbing at Cai Lay and Cai Be (My Tho),

Tan Chau and Hong Ngu (Kien Phong), and in Chau Doc, Chuong Thien, Phong Dinh, and Ba Xuyen in western Nam Bo. In eastern Nam Bo, the enemy contended fiercely with us in Long An, Hau Nghia, Binh Duong, Gia Dinh, and Bien Hoa. They used main-force troops, with air support, to launch strong attacks in areas bordering the Phuc Vinh-Dong Xoai, Loc Tan (Binh Long), and Xa Mat (Tay Ninh) liberated areas, and used rangers and regional forces to set up blocking positions in the Bu Prang area and at the Tuy Duc interesection, in hopes of blocking our corridor. In Military Region 6 the enemy used infantry, supported by tanks, artillery, and air power, to attack many places in Binh Thuan, Ninh Thuan, Binh Tuy, Lam Dong, and Tuyen Duc, and used artillery to shell the contiguous areas to stop us and relieve besieged positions.

Within a little more than a month after the Agreement was signed, the enemy relieved sieges and grabbed land in many areas, especially around the cities and towns and along the important roads. They retook nearly all of the 394 hamlets which we had liberated prior to the signing of the Agreement.

For our part, after the Paris Agreement came into effect, although we had foreseen that the enemy would sabotage the Agreement, there were still many shortcomings in our political, ideological, and organizational work. A rather widespread ideological tendency was to believe that the Agreement could be implemented, to believe in the role of the International Commission of Control and Supervision and the Joint Military Commission, and to believe in the possibility of setting up the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord and the tripartite coalition government, etc. But the actual situation demonstrated that because of the open, brazen acts taken by the enemy to sabotage the Agreement from the very beginning, the battlefields had not yet fallen silent:

In Military Region 8 alone, between January and March 1973 the enemy grabbed 24 villages, 120 hamlets, and 287 outposts. Essentially, we consolidated the areas we had opened up prior to the signing of the Agreement, and expanded a number of old liberated areas. Only after COSVN made adjustments, beginning in April, was that distorted situation corrected, and only then was the situation gradually transformed in a good direction.

In Military Region 9, before and after the signing of the Agreement there also appeared the rather widespread phenomenon of pacifist thought and a lack of vigilance. The party organization of Military Region 9 promptly stopped that negative tendency. Less than a week after the Paris Agreement went into effect, on 3 February, the standing committee of the Military Zone Party Committee held a plenary conference. The conference evaluated the great victory of the signing of the Agreement. The masses were very enthusiastic, the movement had been imbued with a new spirit, the morale of the puppet army fell, and the "three spearheads" movement was capable of advancing. The conference foresaw as follows: faced with that situation, it was certain that the enemy would sabotage the Agreement, and their first scheme would be to continue to carry out pacification and land-grabbing. They would counterattack to retake the areas that were lost after 27 January, especially in places where our guard was down, while at the same time using fascist methods to prevent mass uprisings. The conference unanimously recommended to COSVN that we rigorously maintain our offensive status and resolutely

retaliate against the enemy's land-grabbing and pacification, while at the same time promoting the political struggle and strengthening the military proselytizing work, in order to maintain the gains made by the revolution and continue to advance the movement. Once the enemy were willing to implement the Agreement, and especially the articles regarding the cease-fire and the exercise of democratic rights, we would place the political struggle and military proselytizing in the forefront, while making appropriate use of the military offensive prong, depending on the specific situation.

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[Text] The conference affirmed that the offensive mode was to attack in such a way that the enemy could not denounce us; attack to win the sympathy of the puppet troops, isolate the bullies, and win the support of the people; attack to create conditions for promoting the political movement of the masses and the military proselytizing work, and win over additional people; and attack so that the enemy suffered blows, without affecting our diplomatic struggle. The principal direction of attack would be in the contested areas, in areas controlled by the enemy, and in highly populated, prosperous areas, in order to gradually transform the contested areas into liberated areas and areas under enemy control into contested areas.

Because they were agile with regard to strategic guidance and promptly and accurately evaluated the plots and schemes of the enemy and the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy and ourselves, determined correct operational slogans and modes, provided specific guidance and command, were unified from top to bottom, and their forces coordinated their activities harmoniously, the soldiers and people of Military Region 9 won one victory after another, defeated the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing plans, and defended the liberated areas.

The guidance experiences of Military Region 9 were a lesson in grasping the viewpoint of violence, fully understanding the offensive concept, and taking the initiative in counterattacking and attacking the enemy to protect the gains made by the revolution.

After a period of intensive work with Nguyen Hau Tho, Huynh Tan Phat, and Tran Bau Kiem on the work of the political administration, after 20 January 1973 I returned to the military work. During the time I was assigned by COSVN to work with the Provisional Revolutionary Government, which was the responsibility of Tran Van Tra, the deputy commander, and Tran Do, the deputy political officer. At that time, Tra was urgently preparing for his departure. On 28 January 1973 the head of the military delegation of the South was present at Tan Son Nhat.

I continually reported on the situation and studied the guidance opinions of the Political Bureau on the struggle slogans and modes and attentively listened to the experiences of military regions 8 and 9 and the communiqués of the upper echelon on the situations in the Military Region 5 and Central Highlands theaters. We prepared for a meeting of the standing committee of COSVN in mid-March.

During those first days of 1973 there was a truly heavy work load. Everything, from carrying out an "opportunity plan" to winning additional victories prior to a political solution, and closely monitoring developments on the battlefields in order to reach accurate conclusions and determine proper operational modes, to moving the leadership organ closer to the front so that it could promptly guide the localities in organizing struggle, guiding the return of enemy POW's and the receiving of our people, etc., was carried out with great urgency.

One month after the Agreement was signed, on 27 February, we analyzed the situation and reviewed all aspects of guidance in order to report to the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, while holding discussions to achieve unanimity in the COSVN standing committee determining the direction for guiding the localities in applying the struggle slogans and modes, and applying experiences in fighting the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing, protecting the people, and consolidate and develop the revolutionary forces.

Directive 02 of COSVN, which manifested the spirit of the above-mentioned exchange of opinions, helped the localities have a basis on which to determine struggle modes in the new situation.

On 2 March 1973, at a local military conference held at Bu Dop which was attended by representatives of all provinces and a number of districts, on behalf of COSVN I relayed the spirit of that directive, which affirmed the victory of historic significance won by our nation after nearly 20 years of fighting the United States; the new plots of the United States and its puppets; the special characteristics and developmental characteristics of the situation; and our struggle stands, slogans, and modes in the new situation.

The matters we debated most vigorously were how to use the armed forces as appropriately and effectively as possible, under the conditions of our endeavoring to consolidate peace while the enemy were openly sabotaging the agreement, and how the legal struggle should be carried out to bring into play combined strength, maintain the offensive under the new conditions, etc. The conference unanimously agreed to oppose two negative tendencies: acting as if there was no agreement and doing as we wished, or not daring to take up arms to fight the enemy when they attacked us or restrict ourselves to the articles of the enemy, which the enemy themselves had sabotaged from the beginning.

On 7 March I returned from Bu Dop to the Regional Command and learned that a message had been sent ordering me to go to Hanoi to attend a meeting. I was very pleased because during more than a month of implementing the Agreement many new problems had arisen which needed to be discussed and debated, and it was necessary to request the opinion of the Central Committee to affirm the path of advance in the new situation, in which the United States and its puppets were openly and brazenly violating the Agreement.

Thus after 4 years I had an opportunity to go north. Throughout 1972 I had seldom been affected by malaria, I was in good health, and my blood pressure was relatively stable, so I would work continuously.

There was little time to prepare for the trip. We held a meeting of the organs of the Regional Command, recapitulated the military situation in 1972, and discussed a work plan for the coming period.

A plenary meeting of the standing committee of COSVN was held on 16 and 17 March, before we set out. After approving the 1972 recapitulation report, we entered deeply into evaluating the situation, confirming directions, and preparing opinions to report to the Political Bureau.

A matter with which we were especially concerned was evaluating our status and strength on the battlefield and comparing the forces of ourselves and the enemy. The United States and its vassals had withdrawn all of their troops but the puppet forces were still large, they were still able to hold down the people and conscript troops, and still received military and economic aid from the United States. In places where we were strong, the puppet troops were conciliatory. In places where we were weak and vulnerable, they concentrated in encroachment.

The problem that was posed during that conference was how to evaluate the development of the revolution in the South. Would the enemy accept the formation of a tripartite coalition government or continue to sabotage the agreement?

Analyzing the thought of the cadres and people during the past several months, we noted two distinct tendencies. The first was overconfidence in the capability to implement the Agreement, which led to relaxing vigilance, allowing the enemy to encroach, and not defending the gains made by the revolution. The second was not fully realizing the significance of the victory of signing the Agreement, and not knowing how to rely on the Agreement to apply struggle slogans and modes that were appropriate to the conditions of each place and time.

We concluded that it was necessary to provide timely guidance so that the localities could overcome the distorted manifestations between peace and war, and affirm determination to employ all forms of struggle to maintain and develop the victory of the Agreement, while resolutely retaliating against the enemy's encroachment and pacification. It was necessary to guide the localities and units in correctly evaluating the general situation and the specific situations in each area, and correctly foresee the plots and schemes of the enemy, and the strengths and weaknesses of ourselves and the enemy, in order to apply appropriate forms of struggle, while continually consolidating and developing our actual strength, adding troops, equipment, and weapons and ensuring that the armed forces were prepared to fight under all circumstances.

Finally, two matters were agreed upon by the conference and summarized by Pham Hung: 1) In the immediate future, the localities would be guided in, on the basis of the actual situation, appropriately reorienting the struggle and combining the military, political, troop proselytizing, and legal aspects in order to transform the situation; 2) In the long range, the situation could develop in one of two ways: either the enemy would agree to carry out the agreement and set up a tripartite coalition government, or they would sabotage the agreement and the war would be expanded. It was necessary to prepare

politically, ideologically, and organizationally so that we could take the initiative in either eventuality.

The official conference of the standing committee of COSVN concluded in the afternoon of 17 March. But after the evening meal we continued to discuss things until late at night. Those discussions included a number of people who had not attended the standing committee conference during the past 2 days. We exchanged opinions and there were intimate conversations between those who were about to set out and those who would remain behind.

The situation was undergoing complicated changes and it was quite possible that the war would take place on an increasingly larger scale. We were determined to maintain and develop the revolutionary accomplishments that were achieved during nearly 20 years of resistance war against the US imperialists, in order to win complete victory. As for the enemy, they obstinately continued on the path of "Vietnamizing the war" and tried to keep Vietnam within the neocolonial orbit of the United States. It was inevitable that there would occur a life-death struggle between revolution and counter-revolution. That was also the course we intended to recommend to the Central Committee and the Political Bureau, while also recommending that the sectors follow it during the coming months.

The B2 cadre delegation going to attend the Central Committee meeting included Nguyen Van Linh, Deputy Secretary of COSVN in charge of the Saigon-Gia Dinh Zone; Vo Van Kiet, Secretary of the Military Region 9 party committee; Tran Nam Trung, in charge of the Eastern Nam Bo provinces; Nguyen Minh Duong, Secretary of the Military Region 8 Party Committee; and myself, Deputy Secretary of COSVN and commander of the B2 front. The Political Bureau called to the meeting people of all categories.

On the way north we still had to take a round-about route through Cambodia. We set out during the night of 18 March and on the 19th reached Kratie (6), the last troop station of the 470th Division of the Truong Son Corps. The next day we reached troop station 53 in southern Strung Treng (7). We met At and Tuyet, the troop station commanders, and learned that they had received a directive from the High Command and Dong Si Nguyen (8) on arranging for the B2 cadre delegation to travel north. After the Paris Agreement, the United States continued to attack our strategic route from Kratie to the Laotian border. We asked about the situation along the route and our supply shipments. Supplies were continuing to flow south regularly. They were informed that a unit of several thousand new troops would soon be sent to reinforce the B2 theater.

We were very pleased. The sending of supplies and troops south not only fulfilled the requirements of the battlefield but also allowed one to discern the strategic intention of the upper echelon in the new situation.

During the past several days, enemy aircraft had been very active along the Mekong River and Route 13 in Cambodia, especially in the area where the Sekong and Srepok rivers converged near Strung Teng. We had to remain there two nights because the enemy attacked continuously and we could not assemble a ferry. Taking advantage of the time we had to spend waiting in the bunker

the military engineers had constructed for visitors, about three kilometers from the ferry landing, I tried to complete the military report. At the beginning of March the High Command had requested that recapitulation reports be sent, including a recapitulation report on the Nguyen Hue campaign (9), but we hadn't had time to complete it.

Not until the night of 22 March could we cross the river safely. All along the route the enemy continued to attack incessantly. Traveling by vehicle at night was very tense.

On the night of the 23rd our convoy arrived at Ta Ngau, near the Laos-Cambodia border, where the headquarters of the 470th division was located.

The division's mission was transportation from southern Saravanne to Phi Ha. From there, one branch split off in direction of the B2 theater and another went to Ta Xeng in the B3 theater (10), for the northern and southern Central Highlands. Our delegation met Col. Nguyen Lang, commander of the 470th Division, and many old friends, and was briefed on the situation on the route for which the division was responsible.

[18 Mar 86]

[Text] We were very enthusiastic when we learned that the transportation and support forces had been reorganized and strengthened, and were much stronger than in past years. The water-borne transportation, communications, air defense, and military engineer forces had all been consolidated and supplemented. Supplies were quite ample. Furthermore, after the Paris Agreement the enemy had attacked less often in Laos, so we had been able to organize the growing of greens. The living conditions of the troops of the units along the route had been greatly improved in comparison to the past. Their health was good.

Nguyen Lang arranged for me to meet and speak with cadres of the division command organ. On behalf of the cadres and men of the B2 theater, I spoke of the gratitude of those on the battlefield for those on the strategic transportation route, who had contributed their efforts and sacrificed to increase the fighting strength of the soldiers and people in the South. I also described what that route had been like 7 years previously, when I went to the Central Highlands. At that time the route was being developed and was still narrow, but now it had become a broad route, an artery along which the strength of the great rear area was relayed to the great front line, to the Zone 5, Central Highlands, and Nam Bo fronts, and to our friends on the Cambodian battlefields. When discussing the battlefield situation during the several months since the Paris Agreement, and the plots and schemes of the enemy, and the requirement of strengthening our forces and maintaining combat readiness, I expressed hope that they would continue to make all-out efforts in guiding transportation and fulfilling the plan for the great rear area to aid the great front line. One of the matters to which I directed their attention was the necessity to restrict attrition to a minimum, and especially the necessity to avoid wasting manpower and materiel on the transportation route.

The next day, 24 March, we arrived at troop station 37 at the Phi Ha intersection, which was regarded as a "strategic intersection" with regard to transportation, not because it was near Ta Xeng (at the borders of the three Indochinese countries) but because it was a point at which transportation routes diverged: the southwestern route went to the B2 theater and the eastern route went to the B3 theater. I remembered that in 1966, when I went to the B3 theater, I had also stopped at that location, which at that time was still thickly forested, and met a group of medical cadres headed by Vu Van Can, head of the Military Medical Department, which had been sent south by the Military Commission to study and resolve the malaria problem in the B3 theater. At that time, the health of troops in that theater was a hot topic. Since then Phi Ha had become an open space; the entire area had been thoroughly plowed up by U.S. bombs.

Traveling north from Phi Ha, we did not go by way of the Bac ferry landing, but followed a new route by crossing the Sekong River and going north to Saravane. That route was more hidden and was not attacked as much by the enemy, so we could travel by day. On the afternoon of the 24th we crossed the Sekong. After crossing the river, while waiting for the other vehicles to cross I met with Laotian comrades, members of the Attapeu provincial party committee, who were also traveling that route. We held a conversation, inquiring about one another's health and about the situation. They were very happy and optimistic. One of them spoke Vietnamese rather fluently. After the locality was liberated the governmental administration was consolidated, but the bandits continued to operate rather strongly, especially in Bolovens Plateau area. I was truly moved when I met with our comrades in arms on that Truong Son route, the route which tied together the three fraternal Indochinese peoples in the struggle against the common enemy.

After bidding adieu to our friends, we continued our journey and during the night of the 25th reached the Xe Noi troop station in the foothills north of the Bolovens Plateau. Meticulous preparations had been made to greet the Sihanouk delegation, which traveled from the north of our country to the liberated area in Cambodia after the Paris Agreement was signed, and was now used as a camp for a military engineer road-building unit. The housing area had been built on a hill with tall, large trees which were sparse but provided very good coverage. The natural setting was very attractive. The houses were constructed of bamboo and wood but were quite spacious. There were electric lights at night.

After more than a week of continuous, rather tense travel we decided to remain there a day to rest. The men at the camp organized a hunt and shot a deer. That day we were able to take a leisurely bath and were treated to a meal of fresh venison, so we were greatly refreshed. The unofficial exchanges of opinions within the B2 cadre delegation, which had taken place over the past several days, continued, sometimes between two people, sometimes among three people, and sometimes by the delegation as a whole. The battlefield situation, the tasks that faced us, and the matters about which we would report and request the opinion of the Central Committee, etc., continually dominated our thoughts.

In the South, was the present situation one of war or peace? Clearly, warfare

was not taking place as in the past, but it was not that no gunfire could be heard on the battlefield. What would be the most accurate way of evaluating the situation, in order to recommend the most appropriate guidelines, missions, slogans, and modes during the coming important conference of the Political Bureau?

During a discussion in the morning of 26 March, Vo Van Kiet and Nguyen Minh Duong provided additional information about the situation in the Mekong Delta, especially the enemy plot in Military Region 4 (11).

After spreading a map on the table, they spoke of the enemy plot in Military Region 4. On the basis of a comparison of forces that was still favorable to them (in some places the enemy outnumbered us five to one), the enemy were implementing a policy characterized by Vo Van Kiet as the "three prevents" (preventing the masses from arising, preventing the puppet administration from collapsing, and preventing the puppet army from disintegrating). At the beginning of March we learned that they had drafted a specific plan to pacify Military Region 4 in 1973. It had the following goals: 1) Occupying 85 percent of the land and controlling 95 percent of the population; 2) Restoring the situation to the way it was prior to March 1972. They hoped to complete that plan within a year, i.e. by the end of February 1974. The enemy had divided their plan into three phases. During the first phase (March to May 1973) they would pacify and occupy the Chuong Thien area. During the second phase (June to September) they would pacify and occupy U Minh. During the third phase (October 1973 to February 1974) they would pacify southern Ca Mau and consolidate the newly occupied areas. Among those areas, the enemy regarded Chuong Thien as the foremost objective. Chuong Thien consisted of the districts of Vinh Thuan and Go Quao, and parts of Giong Rieng (Rach Gia), Long My (Can Tho), and Ngang Dua (which the enemy called Hieu Thien), in Bac Lieu. It was an area of mobile operations situated in the midst of the Hau River provinces. The enemy hoped to use that area as a staging area for attacking the U Minh base, and as an area for blocking and defending the city of Can Tho, which they called the capital of the Mekong Delta.

After an exchange of opinions, we predicted that the enemy would concentrate large forces, including supporting technical combat arms to, first of all, attack and occupy the Chuong Thien area, then enter the U Minh base area and move down into Ca Mau, to attain the land and population control goals that had been set.

The soldiers and people of Military Region 9 were directed by COSVN to draft a plan to prepare to fight the enemy and defeat the enemy's plan to attack and occupy the delta region.

The more we exchanged opinions and analyzed the battlefield situation, the more we came to realize the enemy's insidious plot and to realize that the effort to achieve the first possibility--maintaining peace--would be an extremely complicated and difficult struggle.

We wanted to carry out the Agreement, but the enemy continually violated it and sabotaged it with increasing brazenness.

Would it not be difficult to prevent the warfare from spreading?

That afternoon I leisurely visited the segment of the route I had traveled in 1966, when following the Truong Son route south to the Tay Nguyen and Zone 5 theaters. At that time new branch routes were being extended south of the Bac River by military engineer troops under the command of Nguyen Van Nhan, and although they were hastily built military roads the enemy discovered them and used airplanes to attack them continuously, night and day.

The military engineer troops and Assault Youth who build the Truong Son route during the initial phase of the anti-U.S. war had a much more difficult time than when they were building the Tay Bac route. They lacked food and drink, they had malaria, they worked urgently, and the enemy attacked fiercely. If they had not had the very ardent patriotism and very strong fighting will of a revolutionary army, and a spirit of "splitting the Truong Son to save the nation," how could they have overcome the difficult challenges facing everyone every day and every hour?

The banana plants along the road became more and more tattered. Some troop units passing that way had to eat banana shoots dipped in salt or cooked with dried fish paste and stream water. Sometimes there was not enough rice to eat and there was not enough salt to be tasted. Many troops who contracted malaria along the way had to be left behind. Even when we went south some of our guards had to be left behind. Even some of the strong, healthy youths could not endure the attacks of jungle malaria.

Only a few years later the appearance of the Truong Son route north of Loc Ninh had changed completely. The enemy attacked with increasing ferocity. They attacked with all kinds of airplanes, including B52's, and used chemical poisons to defoliate the trees and napalm to burn the jungle, dropped various kinds of lethal mines, used electronic equipment to detect facilities and people passing by, etc., but with no effect. We continued to expand the route, and in addition to the main roads we built many detours and alternate roads. There was two-way movement of motorized traffic. Trucks going south carried supplies and troops and those going north carried the wounded. The trucks obtained gasoline near the road. The oil pipeline reached Ban Phon in southern Saravanne.

The route connected the great rear area with the great front line. By the sweat and blood shed on that route, the soldiers and people of the south and north, with the assistance of the fraternal Laotian and Cambodian people, worked shoulder-to-shoulder to overcome the months and years that were difficult and arduous beyond imagination to attain the victories of today. Between then and the day of total victory, that miraculous route--the Ho Chi Minh trail--which had constantly been praised by the world press as roads in a fable, would continue to be an artery which endlessly nourished the battlefield.

On 27 March we resumed our journey and stopped at the headquarters of the 471st Division in a sparsely forested, secluded area at the foot of a hill in the southern part of Muong Noong district, through which as crystal-clear

stream flowed. Our group was well provided for and that night viewed the color film of the popular opera "Tran Quoc Toan Goes to Battle".

From that point on the road was safer. We were able to travel more by day.

On the afternoon of the 28th we reached K.94, a troop station under the direct control of the 471st Division. It had received a visiting delegation of the Cambodian government the previous month. That night the political officer of Group 559 arrived there from the north. He had been assigned to the Truong Son route after the Paris Agreement was signed. We had known each other for a long time. During the anti-French resistance he was at Ta Ngan and then was assigned to the Operations Department. Before being assigned to the Truong Son route he was the political officer of the Air Defense-Air Force branch. He was always optimistic, life-loving, and close to the cadres and troops, and knew how to bring collective strength into play to fulfill missions. Everyone loved and respected him because he was good-natured and open. He liked the arts and knew how to sing popular opera and write poems. Along the Truong son route the drivers often recited his poems, including one they called "Covered With Dust":

"I salute the heroic convoys,
The drivers on the Truong Son:
Their heads are young but their hair is white
Because of layers of road dust!
I salute the convoys of steel horses
Whose bodies are covered with the
Green camouflage leaves of the Truong Son.
But their hair is still white!"

[19 Mar 86]

[Text] He told us about the situation in the North, about the "Dien Bien Phu in the air" above Hanoi, and the situation along the route from the north.

Something I did not suspect was that only a few days later, when our group reached Hanoi, we learned that he had been killed when his car struck a mine on Route 23 en route to Saravanne. A helicopter brought his body back to Hanoi. I visited him and tried to hold back my emotion as I stood by the coffin of a close, beloved, very loyal and ardent comrade who had a very strong sense of responsibility.

On the 29th we left K94 and continued our northward journey. The road became very broad, especially the segment from Muong Noong to Ban Dong-Route 9. Some segments which had been concealed from the air and were continually attacked, but had been repaired and widened into depot areas or had become level, straight road segments broad enough for three vehicles.

Between Ban Dong and Lao Bao we stopped several times to listen to our guides talk about our counterattack which defeated the "Lam Son 719" operation, involving more than 70 enemy battalions, in the spring of 1971. At that time, Nixon and Thieu regarded that offensive as "having a decisive nature." The enemy hoped to "cut the throat" of the Viet Cong," i.e. to cut our strategic

supply line. But within a period of only 2 months, we won many large battles and the enemy had to retreat with heavy defeats. Along a stretch of road nearly 20 kilometers long, we saw many wrecks of enemy tanks and armored vehicles, the tracks of which had rusted.

When we reached Huong Hoa it was still light. We went to see the Khe Sanh battlefield, the center of which was the Ta Con airfield. The names Khe Sanh, Lang Vay, and Ta Con were at one time the titles of songs by many musicians and were daily topics in the U.S. and Western press during the spring and summer of 1966. The U.S. generals could not keep their promise to their president and were forced to send Marines into the jungle to "live or die with Khe Sanh." But then the U.S. troops had to abandon that strongpoint after 5 months of being attacked and besieged to "avoid a second Dien Bien Phu." The Khe Sanh battle, and the battle in which the Lang Vay strongpoint was annihilated, which marked the first time our tanks had appeared face-to-face with U.S. troops on the southern battlefield. The armored combat arm won the first battle it fought.

The Ta Con airfield was still in good condition. The troops both defended the airfield and managed the supply depot, one of our major "customers," which was defended by the air defense troops, so that oil could be "poured" to the battlefield.

At that time the Quang Tri provincial party committee was located north of Route 9, between Cam Lo and Dong Ha. We arrived at the provincial party committee headquarters at dusk on 30 March. Than, who was previously secretary of the Vinh Linh party committee and was now secretary of the Quang Tri provincial party committee, and Binh, head of the provincial unit, waited by the roadside to greet our delegation. They informed us of the situation in the liberated area since the signing of the Agreement. From the very beginning of the conversation something that attracted our attention was the division of territory, especially in Quang Tri-Thua Thien, where the land area was small and the puppet forces were still large. Clearly, if the lowlands were left to the enemy, while we remained in the contiguous areas and in the jungles-and-mountains areas, that would only benefit them. It was necessary to maintain, by all means, the interspersed "comb teeth" status both west and east of Route 1, although in the lowland we only had small enclaves, our forces were still weak, the mass movement had not yet developed, and the legal struggle was still difficult. But that was a very important matter if we were to achieve an advantageous position and maintain and develop the movement.

They spoke of the prolonged days of anxiety when the enemy counterattacked the Cua Viet port. The enemy launched four large sweeping operations called "Song Than" in an effort to take the port on the border of the two regions, an important port with regard to aid for our great front line. We knew that our comrades in Hanoi could not enjoy Tet because of that prolonged struggle. During the final battle the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee sent Le Trong Tan to take direct command, after which we annihilated most of the enemy armored brigade. Victory was ours.

The next morning our vehicle turned onto Route 1. Dong, the secretary of the Vinh Linh party committee, came to the Hien Luong bridge to greet our delegation.

I tried to restrain my emotion when I set foot on the bridge, a temporary pontoon bridge which permanently linked the two regions of our country. During the past 20 years the enemy had wanted to destroy the Hien Luong bridge to isolate the Ben Hai River, permanently divide the nation, and divide North and South. But our nation was one and our people were one. The iron-like determination and resolute will of the people of the North and South connected the spans of the Hien Luong Bridge and the two banks of the Ben Hai River.

We passed through the town of Ho Xa. Throughout a 10-year period that small town had every day and every hour braved the bombs and shells of the enemy. The streets and buildings were obliterated and there remained only pile of broken bricks and fallen reinforced cement columns. On the two sides of the river and along the road from the Hien Luong bridge to Ho Xa, here and there a new thatched-roof house had been erected.

While spending the night in stalwart Vinh Linh, we listened to stories about steadfast Vinh Linh and heroic Con Co.

Over the course of many days of the most fierce enemy attacks, the cadres, troops, and people of Vinh Linh continued to resolutely hold their ground. Since the beginning of the year, some old people and children who had evacuated had begun to return. The green rice had headed. The fields were gradually reassuming their unbounded, fresh green appearance.

In a spacious, reinforced bunker a few kilometers from the town of Ho Xa, which had long been the party committee headquarters and the forward headquarters of the Vinh Linh zone, we conversed with the local leadership cadres until very late at night. In recent years, the combat order and news of victories that had been sent out from that bunker had mobilized the fighting will and stalwart spirit of unyielding Vinh Linh and heroic Con Co. In the past, we had only learned about the victories of the soldiers and people of Vinh Linh and Con Co from the radio and newspapers, but now we sat and listened to the local leadership comrades and military commanders tell stories. We felt even more emotion and admiration. In June 1968 Uncle Ho sent a letter congratulating Vinh Linh for shooting down the 200th U.S. plane. He also sent a letter congratulating Con Co for shooting down there enemy airplanes in an hour. Speaking of the immediate immediate tasks, they noted that the missions of that front-line area of the great rear area were still very difficult. The tasks of filling in bomb craters, building schools and clinics, consolidating armed forces, maintaining combat readiness, continuing to play the role of being the front line of the great rear area in the north vis-a-vis the great front line in the South, etc., had been set forth and were being urgently carried out, with the goal of enabling the lives of the people and soldiers to rapidly return to normal.

Early the next morning we continued our trip and arrived at the headquarters of Group 559. Dong Si Nguyen was away on assignment but we met with Pham Khac

ly and command staff, and listened while they spoke in a general way about the strategic transportation route.

Fourteen years previously the route had been begun, when the Military Commission assigned comrade Vo Ban the mission of commanding a unit to construct the route, many segments of which followed in the footsteps made during the previous resistance war. The route became an increasingly clear reality, both on maps and in fact. The resolute combat life of hundreds of thousands of outstanding children of the Fatherland, who came there from all parts of the nation to survey, build roads, transport supplies, and fight to defend the route, contributed to building that important strategic project and contributed to determining victory for the great undertaking of liberating the South and the revolutions of all three Indochinese nations.

From the initial footsteps of a commo-liaison unit, recently organized road transportation units, and nonmotorized transportation (back packs, pack bicycles), with requirements of absolute secrecy, of "leaving no tracks, cooking without smoke, and speaking without words," the strategic transportation route was no longer what the enemy had called a "trail." Since the beginning of 1965 the had enemy attacked continuously and we had built continuously. The route had become a network of motor roads, foot trails, river routes, pipelines, a network of warehouses and supply depots, and a network of firepower and infantry positions to defend the route--manned by hundreds of thousands of cadres, enlisted men, and Assault Youth--which connected northern Indochina with southern Indochina.

Speaking of the units which built and defended that route, General Secretary Le Duan affirmed that "The great victory of the revolution in the South cannot be separated from the activities of Group 559. The victory of the South and the activities of Group 559 are two great accomplishment of our people."

The troops defending the route gained more and more experience and fought back against the enemy resolutely and effectively, so by 1972-1973 the ratio of enemy bombs hitting the road had dropped to only 0.18 percent.

The road network continued to be extended toward the battlefields. By that time (1973) we had many north-south and east-west branch road and alternate roads to the battlefields which totaled more than 10,000 kilometers.

the results of building an increasingly more complete road network and sending increasingly larger quantities of supplies and number of troops to the battlefields proved our increases strength with regard to both status and forces, from the rear area to the front. The enemy had to admit the defeat of their bombs and shells, electronic reconnaissance aircraft, and the various kinds of bombs dropped all along the route by the steadily growing strength of that miraculous route. Referring to the strong vitality of that route, the U.S. press had to admit that "We can only slow down their transportation of supplies and force them to pay a high price, but it is certain that we cannot stop them." (The U.S. magazine NEWSWEEK, 31 March 1969).

Bidding adieu to the Command staff of Group 559, at 1400 that day (1 April) we went to the Dong Hoi airfield. An IL.14 aircraft was awaiting us.

It was afternoon. Looking down from aboard the airplane, we could clearly see the bomb craters, especially along the roads and at ferry landings. But the dominant sight was still the immense greenness of the spring rice under the early summer light. That greenness was also the immortal greenness of the nation. In two resistance wars the U.S. imperialists had been defeated by our troops and people. Its wounds of war were still oozing blood but it would definitely not "return to the stone age," as the U.S. warmongers desired. On the contrary, because they expanded the war to the North the U.S. ruling circles were condemned by all mankind, which caused the United States to "become a nation which has lost much support, and one of the most hated nations in the world," as Montgomery, the English Marshall, observed in the NEW YORK TIMES (5 July 1968).

At 1700 hours our airplane was flying over Hanoi, a Hanoi that was heroic, resolute, intelligent, and creative, a Hanoi that was very beautiful and lovable, the capital and heart of the entire nation.

[21 Mar 86]

[Text] One of the foremost aspirations of the B2 cadre delegation was to soon be able to visit Uncle Ho. Preparations were being made to begin the construction of Uncle Ho's tomb. His corpse was being protected and cared for by doctors at a location outside Hanoi.

A few days after we arrived at the capital we had the honor of Vu Ky arranging for the entire delegation to visit Uncle Ho. As I sat in the car I remembered the last two times I had seen Uncle Ho in the past.

The first time was at the beginning of 1966, when I was preparing to set out for the Military Region 5 theater to pass along the resolution of the 12th plenum of the Party Central Committee. Many members of the Political Bureau were also present that day at the modest house where Uncle Ho worked. He enquired about my health and about the arrangements that had been made for my family in the rear area. He instructed me about my trip and then assigned me my mission and sent greetings from himself and the Party Central Committee to the cadres, soldiers, and people in the South. Then he suddenly turned to ask the Political Bureau members, "I have many times stated my desire to go south. Why have you not made arrangements for me to go? Many other cadres, such as Uncle Thai here, have gone, so why won't you let me go?"

I still remember that Uncle Ho expressed disagreement when they said that the reason was his health. That year Uncle Ho was 76 years old. The second time, in April 1969, when I was going to work in Nam Bo, Pham Hung and I were summoned to participate in a plenary meeting of the Political Bureau to brief it on the situation and firmly grasp the leadership stand of the Central Committee toward the enemy's new strategic plot.

One day Uncle Ho called the two of us in. He was much weaker than he had been three years ago. The members of the Political Bureau admonished us that to maintain Uncle Ho's health we should not let him work, that when we met with him we should limit our report to an hour, only report good news to him, and

avoid making him sad and have to worry. We strictly obeyed that instruction. During our first meeting with him, he thoughtfully received us and enquired about our health, about our trip, and about the situation of the people and troops in the South.

Before we returned to the battlefield, Uncle Ho again called us. We ate a meal with him. During meal Uncle Ho ate a full bowl of rice. Seeing that made us very happy.

Before we left Uncle Ho shook our hands and suddenly asked the same question he had asked several years previously, "When can you arrange for me go South?"

We looked at each other. We were moved and didn't know how to answer him. We understood that he had grown much weaker. That Uncle Ho could go south was an aspiration shared night and day by the 14 million people of the north. We also understood that Uncle Ho's question had the significance of being a mission entrusted by the Central Committee and Uncle Ho to the soldiers and people of the South: to make maximum efforts to fulfill at an early date the mission assigned them by the Central Committee and Uncle Ho, to "Fight until the Americans get out and the puppets collapse," and complete the enterprise of liberating the South so that the people could soon be visited by Uncle Ho.

Finally, Pham Hung passed on that thought to Uncle Ho, who expressed his pleasure, advised us to take care during our trip, and encouraged us to fulfill our mission and did not forget to remind us to relay his greetings to the cadres, people, and soldiers of the South.

We would never have thought that after returning to the battlefield, just after the first phase of the 1969 Binh Long campaign concluded (May 1969), Uncle Ho wrote his Testament. At the end of the second phase of the campaign (at the end of August 1969), we received a telegram from the Secretary the Military Commission who informed us that Uncle Ho had weakened. According to the message, Uncle Ho had enquired how the Binh Long campaign was going. Members of the Military Commission informed him that the troops of eastern Nam Bo had fought well. At the beginning of September, while the Regional Command staff and I were commanding the third phase of the campaign, COSVN received news that Uncle Ho had passed away.

How could we describe the emotion we felt? We had lived close to Uncle Ho, saw both his greatness and nobility and his simplicity and love, and had met with him only recently. I went to meet Pham Hung, who was ill. After informing him of the sad news, we sat silent for a long time. Who would have thought that our meeting with Uncle Ho in April would be our last meeting with him?

Hung told me to work with the Propaganda-Training Department of COSVN in drafting a telegram to send to Hanoi. Never in my life had I held a pen while feeling such strong emotion inside. When we completed the draft we submitted it to Pham Hung and the members of COSVN and the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam for approval. The telegram included the following passages:

"During this painful and moving time for the entire nation, the South is regretful that it had not yet victoriously complete the enterprise of national liberation so that it could receive a visit by Uncle Ho, satisfy his long-held ambition of all people, cadres, and troops who, replying to the sacred appeal of Uncle Ho, have heroically and persistently fought for more than 20 years....

"In order to be worthy of the immeasurable merit of President Ho and be worthy of his concern and care, and to realize his noble ambition and follow the path he delineated for our entire population and army, the 14 million people of the South promise their 17 million compatriots in the North that they will unite closely, millions as one, to transform sorrow into strength. They are determined to persevere and promote the resistance war, and are determined to fight and win, fight until all U.S. troops have to withdraw, fight until the puppet administration and army collapse, and until liberate the South, defend the North, and advance to the peaceful unification of the Fatherland."

The NFLSV and the PRG selected Nguyen Huu Tho to head a delegation of southern cadres to attend Uncle Ho's funeral.

On the battlefield, the troops had transformed sorrow into strength and were winning one shattering victory after another during the third phase of the Binh Long campaign.

The past 4 years rushed past my mind. This time, when we went north we would not be able to take Uncle Ho's hand and listen to his thoughtful, warm words, but could only revere our beloved uncle. He still had a high forehead, fresh facial features, and rosy skin. We stood there a long time. None of us was able to hold back his tears and we felt regret over not being able to achieve Uncle Ho's long-time dream.

The nation's people and soldiers had fulfilled only one of the missions assigned them by Uncle Ho. They had "fought until the Americans withdrew," but had not yet "fought until the puppets collapse." It was necessary to travel the remaining distance to fulfill Uncle Ho's ambition prior to his death, and so that the people of the South could soon go north to visit him. En route back to Hanoi, we were silent for a long time. Everyone wanted to remember Uncle Ho's image and think about the future course of the revolution in the South.

With the encouragement and support of the United States, the puppet army was carrying out a policy of "a ceasefire without a cessation of firing." The agreement had been signed but the enemy were committing more and more crimes. The blood of our people and comrades continued to flow. The sound of gunfire on the southern battlefields had not ceased, but was clearly tending to increase. Correctly determining the path of advance of the revolution in the South had become a very urgent problem.

CHAPTER TWO

The Path of Advance of the Southern Revolution

Two days after we reached Hanoi, Ba (Le Duan) met with the B2 cadre delegation. Ba and the other members of the Political Bureau wanted to hear the opinions of the cadres on the battlefield so that preparations could be made for the conference to be held the following month.

When we arrived, Ba warmly shook everyone's hand and inquired about their health. He said that that meeting, on the morning of 3 April, was not an official one. Many major problems would require time for thinking, exchanging opinion, and carefully debating in order to make correct decisions. Therefore, he would only bring up a few matters so that we could think about them and make preparations before officially beginning work the following week. Many of the matters he brought up coincided with those about which we were still concerned and had discussed with one another during the past month, especially during our trip north, in trying to find solutions.

Ba got down to business immediately and spoke frankly about matters he intended to bring to our attention so that we could think about them and prepare opinions. In general, he said the following:

First of all, how should we evaluate the Paris Agreement? It was a victory, an accomplishment of a long resistance war against the United States. The United States agreed to sign it and were forced to withdraw troops. But Thieu was still in power, the puppet army and puppet administration still existed, the enemy forces were still large, and they still had much equipment. What, then, were the intentions of the United States and Thieu? What were their strengths and weaknesses? What were our strengths and weaknesses? There should be full reporting on the basis of the actual battlefield situation. Even the 1968 Tet Offensive and Uprising should be carefully evaluated, both the victories and the deficiencies.

Second, had the revolution in the South shifted over to a new phase? If so, what would be the content of the next phase be, and what slogans and struggle modes would be appropriate?

Third, on that basis it was necessary to consider what problems had to be resolved by the line of the national democratic revolution in the South, especially in the coming period, to arrive at ultimate victory?

Fourth, what are urgent immediate problems with which leadership had to be concerned? Were the most important matters to win control of the people, win the right of mastership, build up the village bases, and build up the districts? Militarily, was it necessary to consider how the local forces should be built up, how the main-force troops should be built up, and what the main-force troops' TO & E should be so that they could be sufficiently strong to fight. They had to be resolutely reorganized so that they could become an elite force.

First of all, the units had to be at full strength, from the squad level up to the battalion level. If that was to be accomplished, was it necessary to reduce the number of units to bolster the remaining units, and reduce the number of cadres so that they could be sent down to the basic level to do mass proselytizing work and assist the movement?

He added that the April meeting of the Political Bureau had not yet been held. Its members were continuing to consider opinions, think, and prepare the contents of the next meeting, to be held in May, after which, around June, the 21st Plenum of the Party Central Committee would be held. Before leaving, he admonished us to think things over carefully and meticulously prepare our opinions, so that during the following week there could be an exchange of opinions and discussions.

I noted that Ba's work style was very flexible and dynamic, and encouraged the cadres to think, then discuss matters carefully, find the truth, and achieve unanimity.

That working method helped the Central Committee and the Political Bureau more firmly grasp the situation on the battlefields, on the basis of which to adopt correct policies and advance the revolution in the South.

Our delegation met the next day to assign individual members responsibility for concentrating on preparing certain matters, and decide which contents needed to be discussed collectively and which needed to be further clarified by the Ministry of National Defense.

The General Staff provided us with additional information about the situation of the enemy, of both the United States and its lackeys, and in both the United States and Southeast Asia, and about the meeting between the United States and China, China's intentions, and the troop recruitment results.

[24 Mar 86]

[Text] The comrades at the Rear Services General Department needed to inform us about the supply situation during the first 3 months of the year and the remaining months of 1973. I also worked with the Political General Department and briefed it on the political-ideological situation of the cadres and troops after the Paris Agreement and find out about capabilities to send additional cadres to the battlefield.

We used the radio station of the General Staff to exchange opinions with Pham Hung, Secretary of COSVN, and the comrades who "remained at home," about the essential matters, and to learn more about the situation on the battlefield since we left.

Thus with the persuasive opinions expressed by Ba, and the opinions expressed by the organs of the High Command to the comrades in the South, we had a basis on which to carefully discuss the matters that should be reported to the Political Bureau. Although there were some matters about which complete

agreement had not been reached, exchanges and discussions within the delegation began to help us clarify many important matters.

On 4 April we received a message from Nguyen Chuc, in charge of the Operations Department, then a message from Le Duc Anh, commander of Military Region 9, who gave a summary report on the situation in March. In the military region the enemy launched more than a thousand company and battalion sized operations, concentrated in the Chuong Thien area. Thus in comparison to the previous month the number of puppet operations increased by 50 percent but there was less use of air and artillery support and the effectiveness of the operations also declined. The soldiers and people of Military Region 9 resolutely counterattacked and attacked the enemy, forcing them to contract. The number of outposts we took was greater than the number taken by the enemy.

On the basis of that actual situation, and in view of the matters brought up by Ba, the problem that was posed for us was what the struggle slogans and forms should be to be appropriate to the situation on the battlefield, at a time when the enemy were violating the Agreement more and more openly and stepping up pacification and encroachment.

Beginning on 12 April Ba and a number of members of the Political Bureau worked with our delegation. Those work sessions did not have the nature of an official conference. The listened to our reports and contributed opinions, inquired about nearly 2 million hectares and produces 8 to 10 million tons of rice a year. If fully utilized, it could attain 15 million tons of paddy, which would provide about six or seven million tons of commodity rice, double the present commodity rice output (in 1985 the Mekong Delta supplied more than 3 million tons of commodity rice--more than 70 percent of the nation's commodity rice output).

According to calculations by agricultural scientists, because of the natural limitations of the Red River Delta (its limited area, which has already been almost fully developed, and a relatively high population density), the rice production of that area in the coming period cannot grow by more than 8 percent a year. But the Mekong Delta can attain a rate of 10 to 15 percent (the highest rate of increase of rice output in the world at present is 6 to 8 percent). Before the liberation the Mekong Delta had about 8,000 large tractors, 15,000 small tractors, and more than 500,000 other agricultural machines imported from foreign countries. The remaining facilities were various kinds of improved machines and labor tools, most of which were supplied by industry in Saigon. But more than 10 years after the liberation, although the state has invested more than 5,000 large tractors most of the tractors have broken down because they have been used too long and there were no spare parts, so only about 4,500 tractors are still usable, and only about 5,000 small tractors, and fewer than one-tenth of the agricultural machines are still in operation. There is an increasingly serious shortage of labor implements. According to a survey taken in 1985, in the Mekong Delta and in the rural areas around Ho Chi Minh City, the peasants do not have sufficient implements with which to produce. For every three workers there is only one hoe, there is only one sickle for every two workers, there is one shovel for every four people, and there is one scythe for every two households. Seventy percent of the workers still thresh rice by hand and winnow it by using woven

mats and straw hats. During the summer and fall of 1984, because there was excessive rain and high humidity, and because there were no drying machines, a shortage of granary space, and a shortage of transportation facilities, the summer-fall rice mildewed and was swept away by the rain. Nearly 300,000 ton of paddy (nearly 30 percent of the seasonal output) was lost. That amount of rice is sufficient to feed everyone in the city for 6 months. From the point of view of the structure of investment in a hectare of rice by peasants in the Mekong Delta, to produce only enough to eat, on each hectare they need to spread 100 kilograms of area and 50 kilograms of phosphate, and need cultivate the soil only twice. But if they want to produce commodity rice, i.e. practice intensive cultivation, and to increase output by 30 percent, the amount of fertilizer invested must double and the soil must be cultivated an additional time. If they want to increase output by 50 percent, the amount of fertilizer must increase by 350 percent and the land use ratio must double. That applies to the fresh water areas along the Tien and Hau rivers. From that it can be seen that agricultural production in the Mekong Delta depends to a very great extent on assistance from industry in Ho Chi Minh City and in the nation as a whole.

Over a period of more than 10 years industry has developed in the localities and in Ho Chi Minh City, but industry serving agriculture had developed slowly and its organization is not yet rational, which both wastes the capacities of the equipment and does not effectively meet the requirements of production. With regard to the capabilities and technical equipment of industry in Ho Chi Minh City, it is possible to refurbish and manufacture the various kinds of essential tractor parts, such as high-pressure pumps, innertubes and tires, cog wheels, etc. Regretfully, however, no functional organ has stepped forward to organize those activities. Nor has the state assigned norms and supplied materials and capital so that the city can produce them. As a result, thousands of tractors have broken down because of a lack of spare parts and the same is true with regard to agricultural machines. According to an initial survey in the precincts and districts of the municipality with regard to industrial capability, if the state provided sufficient steel, energy, and capital, and part of the technical equipment, Ho Chi Minh City could meet 80 percent of the need for machinery spare parts for agricultural production in the Mekong Delta and the nation as a whole. It could thus provide jobs for tens of thousands of workers. One of the deficiencies that has recently caused very great harm has been the dispersal of the industrial sector's capital. Over a period of more than 10 years the state has built more than 1,000 large and small installations, some of which have been very large, but none produce fertilizer and factories for agriculture. For those things, which are essential for the nation's agriculture, we must depend entirely on foreign countries. Distribution to the localities in a mechanical manner has disrupted the distribution of labor and the development of the economic areas that had previously been formed, has led to the situation of territorial division, has broken up the economic areas, and has caused chaos in production. Many materials and much energy and equipment have been distributed evenly among the localities, which has resulted in the situation of many localities not needing or using all of them, so they sell them or allow them to break down, while the city has factories and workers but no jobs. In addition, the policy of "impeding the flow of commerce" has caused many agricultural products intended to serve the lives of the people and

provide raw materials for the city's industry to be in short supply, and has harmed not only local agricultural production but has also exacerbated the economic situation and social life of the city and the nation as a whole.

We must implement the resolution of the Fourth Congress of the Municipal Party Organization and the new spirit of the draft resolution of the Sixth Party Congress on building an agricultural-industrial economic structure and orienting the industrial sector toward serving the requirements of agriculture. The key to the problem is renovating thought on developing the economic sector. Special attention must be paid to assigning plan missions and reorganizing the industrial sector in Ho Chi Minh City, in order to develop to the city's industrial capability to the maximum to serve agriculture in the Mekong Delta and the entire nation. It is necessary to end the situation of breaking up territorial economic areas and create favorable conditions for industry in the city and in the localities to develop rationally. For the city's part, it must rationally reorganize its industrial sector, concentrating on industries which serve agriculture. The city's industry should manage the principal, important products, such as the various kinds of equipment and spare parts for tractors and the other kinds of agricultural machinery. The precinct echelon should be assigned responsibility for managing labor implements, but it should intensify its product quality inspections. Industries processing and producing machinery to process agricultural products should be more strongly developed to meet the needs of agricultural production in the future.

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CSO: 4209/234

Chapter Three

Creating a New Status and a New Strength

One of the things that made us proud of the party was that throughout the course of leading armed uprisings and revolutionary war, over a long period of time, it had always know how to create opportunities and actively take advantage of strategic opportunities to advance the revolution to decisive turning points. Each of those victories is characterized by a correct, timely strategic decision by the party.

After the resolutions of the Sixth Plenum of the Party Central Committee (November 1939) and the Seventh Plenum (November 1940), and especially the Eighth Plenum (May 1941), when President Ho returned to Vietnam to guide the revolution, our party clearly delineated the path of struggle to win political power for the people and build up the political and armed forces to await strategic opportunities.

Prior to and during the August Revolution, following the directive of 12 March 1945 on "The Fighting Between the Japanese and French and Our Actions" (launching a high tide of resistance against Japan and preparing for a general uprising), and when Japan surrendered to the Allies, the party decided to take advantage of the opportunity to launch a general uprising and quickly take power all over the nation.

During the anti-French resistance war the resolution of the conference of the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee (September 1953) led to the 1953-1954 winter-spring victory, the high point of which was the historic Dien Bien Phu campaign.

In the anti-U.S. resistance war, by means of Resolution 15 (1959) our party decided to launch partial armed uprisings, beginning with a high tide of "simultaneous uprisings," and then defeating the "special war" strategy of the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys step by step. When U.S. troops began to pour into the South, with Resolution 12 (at the beginning of 1966) the party decided to continue to develop our strategic offensive status and gradually defeat the enemy's "limited war" strategy. In mid-1973, only 5 months after the Paris Agreement, Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee (12) affirmed the continuation of the path of revolutionary violence, the continuation of counterattacks and attacks against the enemy, and the defeat of the new U.S.-puppet strategic plot, and opened the way for the final victory of the enterprise of liberating the south. Resolution 21 had a special importance: it determined the correct course for the revolution in the South during the final phase of nearly 20 years of resistance war against the United States for national salvation and 30 years of liberation war.

On the basis of that actual situation, it is possible to affirm that in every phase of the long struggle the party always correctly evaluated the situation, took the initiative in keeping a step ahead in strategic preparations, and mobilized the combined strength of the entire population, in order to promptly create a new status and a new strength, and win increasingly greater victories.

That was one of the outstanding features of our party's strategic skill in leading armed uprisings and revolutionary war.

After participating in the initial phase of the 21st Plenum of the Central Committee, I prepared to return to the battlefield to work with our comrades there in preparing for the COSVN conference that was scheduled to be held around September.

The army doctors recommended that I undergo a physical examination before setting out. During the past 3 months, since I arrived in the North, my health had been good, which put me very much at ease. But there was an unexpected development. The doctors gave me an examination and concluded that I had a myocardial infarction in the past and needed a gall-stone operation. On the recommendation of the medical council, the Organization Department of the Party Central Committee decided that I should undergo treatment in the German Democratic Republic. It was estimated that at least 4 months would be required for treatment and travel.

I was undecided so I exchanged opinions with the members of the standing committee of the Military Commission and sought the opinion of Pham Hung. They recommended that I undertake the treatment. "The war will continue for a long time."

I spent another half-month working with the organs, continued to resolve essential problems for the B2 theater, and sent a message to COSVN which set forth my personal opinions on implementing Resolution 21. On 13 July I set out for the GDR.

I returned to Vietnam in November, bringing along profound, fine impressions of the fraternal friendship and devoted care of the GDR doctors, and of the economic construction and development and lives of the people of that fraternal nation.

[2 Apr 86]

[Text] The war had been over in that country for nearly 30 years. The spirit of selfless labor of the people of the GDR during the past several decades had brought about a steadily improving standard of living. I thought about that a good deal and compared the GDR to the prospects for our country after it was unified, when we would advance the entire country to socialism by passing over the period of capitalist development under the conditions of an agricultural nation with small-scale production which also bore the consequences of two devastating wars and of the old-style and new-style colonialism left behind by the French colonialists and U.S. imperialists.

After returning to Hanoi I reported by telegram to the members of COSVN and the Regional Command. The dry season had arrived. I worked urgently with organs of the Ministry of National Defense to gain full understanding of the aspects relevant to the coming prepared to set out on the return trip to the theater.

The members of the standing committee of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee informed me of the newest decisions regarding the operational policies, the equipment and troop reinforcements, the cadre work and the direction of the political-ideological work, etc. I was confident with regard to the capability for fulfilling the theater's missions during the dry season and the succeeding phases.

In mid-December I telegraphed a reply to Pham Hung, Tran Van Tra, and Tran Do regarding the plan to reinforce the theater in 1974:

"I received your message enquiring about the troops and equipment the High Command will send to the B2 theater during the coming year. As for the number of troops, the final figure approved by the High Command for reinforcing the B2 theater is 26,000.

"A new development that pleases me very much is that the Rear Services General Department and Group 559 will transport those troops by truck and will complete that task during the first 3 months of the year. They will be fed en route at the way stations of Group 559. Thus the troops will arrive more quickly and in better health. This time the reinforcements will be better trained. The training cycles will last about 6 months. In addition to infantry and combat arms, the High Command will also send a rather large number of specialized personnel (cryptanalysts, communications specialists, reconnaissance specialists, and rear services-technical specialists).

"I recommend that you direct the organs to prepare a plan to receive the reinforcements and distribute them in a timely manner, to avoid bottlenecks.

"My requests for cadres to set up an Air Defense Command and for a number of 57mm anti-aircraft units for the B2 theater have not yet been acted upon.

"With regard to military and civilian cargo, in 1974 the central echelon will provide the B2 front with a total of 22,000 tons, including 12,000 tons of military cargo (two-thirds of it weapons and ammunition). The Rear Services General Department plans to complete the shipment of that cargo to the B2 front during the first 4 months of 1974. It is not yet possible to fulfill my requests for 57mm anti-aircraft ammunition and A72 weapons and ammunition. I have also requested (outside the plan) other anti-aircraft guns and DK 82 guns, along with various kinds of ammunition.

"I would like to take the opportunity report to Pham Hung and the members of COSVN on my health situation. On 5 December the physicians' council reexamined me and concluded that my heart beat was still not very stable and that I required an additional period of treatment. The doctors have agreed to make all-out efforts to complete my treatment by the end of January 1974 so that in early February, prior to the lunar new year, I could set out. I will do as Hung said in his message and make all-out efforts to get well."

Intending to return to the B2 theater during the Giap Dan Tet period, I bought Tet gifts and sent them in advance, so that during the trip I could travel light and more rapidly.

At the end of January 1974, when preparations had been completed and I was going to say good-bye to the leadership comrades and the members of the High Command, once again there was an unexpected development.

When I met with Sau Tho he informed me that the Organization Department of the Party Central Committee had recommended to the Political Bureau that I should remain in the North, and it had agreed.

"Why?"

"The physicians' council has just recommended that because you have just undergone a major operation and your heartbeat is not yet very stable, your health cannot be guaranteed, especially during a long trip."

"I recommend that you allow me to go to. I promise to take good care of myself."

"That will not do. We know that you have completed all preparations, but the doctors have discovered your health plan. If we allow you to go to we will be responsible if anything should happen and we would always regret it. You should remain in the North and work with the General Staff to prepare for the decisive phase. The Military Commission of the Party Central Committee and the staff organ must be bolstered so they can assist the Political Bureau and the Party Central Committee."

I knew that the odds were against me. The Political Bureau members agreed with the Organization Department's recommendation that I remain to work with the Ministry of National Defense. The upper echelon also decided to send Tran Van Tra to replace me as commander of the B2 theater. I shook Tho's hand and returned, full of concern and worry, with my thoughts and intentions since the 21st Plenum, and my enthusiastic preparations to return to the battlefield. I thought of each of the members of COSVN and the Regional Command, of the times we had held meetings and exchanged opinions, and of the seething struggle sessions, which were sometimes heated when disagreements arose, in order to arrive at unanimity and solidarity in working together in the fierce test of strength with the enemy troops. I sat for 3 straight hours writing an eight-page letter to report on the situation and my thoughts to Pham Hung and the members of COSVN, and recalled the times we had worked together and our warm comradeship, which I would never forget.

Because I would have to remain in the North, I met with Van and Dung to enquire about my responsibility. They said that the Political Bureau discussed the matter and had just decided that I would be the first deputy chief of the General Staff. They assigned me direct responsibility for guiding reinforcements for the battlefields and for providing operational guidance.

Thus I would resume my previous work with people with whom I had worked in the past. I decided to take things easy so that I could begin work immediately.

At that time the organ was concentrating on helping the upper echelon guide the battlefields in carrying out the dry-season plan. The envoys had returned from the battlefields, bringing back reports on all aspects the situation and recommendations regarding the strategic direction in 1974, in accordance with the spirit of Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee. I reserved much time for listening to the departments and the envoys report on the situation and on the work of the General Staff. I also worked with Song Hao and Dinh Duc Thien in order to unify coordination of the common tasks of the Ministry of National Defense in carrying out Resolution 21.

On that occasion Le Duc Anh, commander of Military Region 9, also reported to the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee. On our recommendation, he sat aside 4 days to report to the General Staff so that we could share experiences about the situation in Military Region 9 since the beginning of 1973. The experiences of Military Region 9 in fighting pacification were still a very important matter about which the strategic staff organ wanted to be fully informed.

Even before the Agreement had been signed, beginning on 11 January 1973, the enemy sent the 21st Division to attack southwest of Long My, while sending many other forces to encroach upon many liberated areas in the military region. The soldiers and people of Military Region 9 fought back against the enemy while reorganizing their forces and preparing to implement a "contingency plan" in accordance with the directive of COSVN and the Regional Command. After more than a week we had defeated the enemy's operation and expanded the Bac Long, My, and Phung Hiep areas.

In March the enemy used the 21st Division, supported by the 9th Cavalry Regiment, to launch an offensive regiment, to launch an offensive campaign in the Chuong Thien area, with the goals of "filling in" our liberated enclaves southwest of Long My, set up a blocking line between Ngang Dua and Vinh Cheo, isolate the U Minh area, and pushing our forces out of that important area. Fully understanding the spirit of the 3 February resolution of the standing committee of the military region party committee, the local soldiers and people resolutely retaliated against the enemy. The first phase of the enemy's offensive in Chuong Thien was defeated.

On 5 June the enemy launched the second phase of their strategic campaign and were once again repulsed. They concentrated more than 60 infantry battalions, four river squadrons, a six M113 squadrons to carry out a large-scale, long-term operation to take the Ba Ho and Lai Hieu areas. The soldiers and people of Military Region 9 resolutely held their ground and the three types of troops continually counterattacked and attacked the enemy, closely coordinated the three offensive prongs, and fought the enemy in the key areas, while drawing in the enemy and stretching them out in the various areas. During a period of 2.5 months (from 15 June to 30 August 1973) the the soldiers and people of Military Region 9 fought more than 200 large and small battles, knocked out of action more than 5,000 of the enemy, defeated the largest enemy offensive in the Chuong Thien area, defended the U Minh base, and created a battlefield position that was advantageous to us.

we concluded that the lessons of Military Region 9 were staunchly defending the area and the battlefield, being responsive in leadership and guidance, correctly evaluating the plots and schemes of the enemy; taking the initiative in resolutely retaliating against the enemy, without being hesitant or indecisive; employing slogans and modes correctly and creatively; closely coordinating the forces and localities; and fighting the enemy continuously and causing the large enemy forces to be stretched thin to cope with us in many areas, be struck with painful blows in the key areas, not be able to attain their objectives, and suffer heavy losses.

Comrade Le Duc Anh also briefed us about the Military Region 8 theater. By the end of 1973 we had essentially retaken the areas and enclaves the enemy had occupied since the end of 1973 north and south of Route 4 and in the "20 July area" (13), Ben Tre, and Kien Tuong, and had expanded many key areas at Mo Cay Nam, Giong Trom, and Mo Cay Bac. We had forced the enemy to abandon more than 50 outposts and retaken 126 hamlets with 45,000 people. In My Tho we had retaken three areas and an enclave and liberated six villages and 12 hamlets with nearly 90,000 people.

Le Trong Tan and Cao Van Khanh, the heads of the operations and militia departments, and I discussed the experiences of the Mekong Delta, especially those of Military Region 9, and agreed to recommend that the High Command convene a conference in May to exchange opinions on guiding anti-pacification measures. The militia and operations departments coordinated in preparing for the conference.

The secretary of the Military Commission said that it would meet in March to review the situation and issue a resolution on the major tasks that must continue to be carried out in the spirit Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee, especially to concretize the operational slogans and modes for the coming period. We exchanged opinions and agreed to assign Tan the task of preparing an agenda to submit for approval by Van, Dung, and the leading comrades of the General Staff before reporting to the Military Commission conference.

[3 Apr 86]

[Text] When exchanging opinions in order to prepare for the draft resolution of the Military Commission, a matter with which we were especially concerned was that recommendations the General Staff would make to the Military Commission and the Political Bureau regarding the direction for creating a new status and new strength before beginning the 1974-1975 dry season. A whole series of preparatory strategic tasks which were already underway needed to be urgently accelerated in order to essentially complete them by the end of 1974; step up the activity cycle at the end of the 1973-1974 dry season and during the current rainy season, in order to create an increasingly advantageous battlefield position; complete the first phase, and begin the second phase, of the plan to transport supplies and reinforcements to the battlefields; guide and oversee the building up of the local and armed forces in the South; complete the strategic and campaign road network and extend the oil pipeline deeper into the South; guide and control the building of on-the-spot rear services along the 559 route and in the liberated areas; fulfill the 1974

troops recruitment plan and the first plan of the 1975; consolidate the main-force troops, especially the strategic mobile main-force troops in the North, including the technical units, including the preliminary recapitulation of the first military training cycle, carrying out the second training cycle, etc.

by completing those preparatory strategic tasks we could not only create a new status and strength in both regions, especially in the South, in order to win a big victory in the coming dry season but also make active preparations to take the initiative should a strategic opportunity arise.

The time I spend working with Tan and Khanh in preparing an agenda to present to the Military Commission, and with the general departments of the Ministry of National Defense, the departments of the General Staff, and the envoys who had just returned from the battlefields, helped me understand the work of the General Staff and the situation on the battlefields.

During 1973 the enemy made very great efforts and we attained a number of results.

They had taken a number of liberated base enclaves consisting of nearly 400 hamlets, set up more than 700 outposts, prevented the puppet army and puppet administration from disintegrating, held down the masses, and further consolidated the areas under their control, especially in the lowlands of Military Region 5.

But they failed to attain their primary goal of eliminating the "leopard spot" status. Since September they had been repulsed in Military Region 9 and stopped in Military Region 8. Although they had grabbed a number of areas in Military Region 5, they had also been brought to a halt there.

The puppet army had been strengthened to an important degree. With aid from the United States, the number of puppet troops had increased (the number of local troops tripled). The puppet army could maintain a small or medium scale of fighting, but it was not sufficiently strong to cope with a large-scale offensive, such as the one we launched in 1972.

Thieu had made progress in consolidating the puppet regime, especially by militarizing the control apparatus at the basic level. But they were highly isolated politically and were encountering economic difficulties.

An outstanding feature was that the morale and combat strength of the puppet army had clearly declined, their strategic deployment had been dispersed and stretched out, and in places in which we resolutely retaliated, such as the Mekong Delta, the enemy were confused and passive.

The U.S. imperialists were encountering many difficulties in their own country and in the world. They were beset with severe internal contradictions. Although they had not yet abandoned their nefarious plot with regard to South Vietnam, they were more constrained and restricted than in the past.

For our part, our number-one, central mission was to smash pacification and oppose land-grabbing. The struggle to gain control of the people and win

mastership for them was extremely fierce, especially in the lowlands of military regions 5 and 8. By that time we had control of about 4 million people, including 1.2 million in the liberated areas.

Operationally, with the policy of counterattacking and attacking, while infiltrating forces into the enemy's rear, we had maintained and stepped up people's war in the localities, especially since September.

The casualty ratio during the past year was 5:1 in our favor, but that ratio was still too high.

The local armed forces had begun to be supplemented and forged and had made progress, especially in the Mekong Delta.

During the past year the North had sent to the battlefields nearly 100,000 troops, so the average combat strength of the battalions had increased from 350 to 400. The units were able to engage in training and combat on a rotational basis. The numbers of technical weapons (field artillery, anti-aircraft artillery, tanks, etc.) had been increased. By the end of 1973 about 15,000 tons of weapons had been sent south via the Truong Son route, but difficulties were still being encountered in transportation to military regions 6, 8, and 9, and to the southern part of Military Region 5.

The tasks of building up the liberated areas and the mountain region bases and assisting Laos and Cambodia, had been carried out actively and urgently.

After grasping the situation in all respects, I thought about it, exchanged opinions with the General Staff members, and noted there were still several weak aspects which we had to make all-out efforts to overcome:

Militarily, the development of the local troops, militia, and guerrillas in the South had still not kept up with the requirements of the strategic missions.

Politically, the urban movement had not made progress, our actual strength at the basic level in enemy-controlled areas was still thin, and our staging areas in the border areas and the corridors connecting the bases were not yet solid. The open legal movement of the third force had not yet develop.

Military aid, especially with regard to offensive weapons and artillery shells, was not as great as in the past.

We assigned the task of resolving those problems to the Operational Department and recommended that the Rear Services General Department recalculate its weapons and equipment and ensure that the operational plans for 1974 and the next several year be on the scales of medium-scale fighting in 1975 and large-scale fighting in 1976, and draft a plan to overcome problems (if there are insufficient heavy artillery shells).

I reported those thoughts to Van, Dung, and the other deputy chiefs of staff, when they were approving the military agenda prepared by Tan.

During the March conference of the Military Commission Tan, on behalf of the General Staff, presented the agenda. After reviewing the all aspects of the situation in 1973, the report of the General Staff recommended a strategic direction and activity slogans and modes for the next several years, in the spirit of Resolution 21.

The conference of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee discussed matters, and issued a resolution, consisting of the following principal points:

1. The central, No 1 mission was still to defeat to an important degree the enemy's pacification, land-grabbing, and delineation of areas plan, win control of the people, win mastership in the lowlands and the outskirts of the large, wealthy cities.
2. It was necessary to gradually advance the movement in the cities, while at the same time preparing basic-level forces and prearranging conditions and an opportunity to give rise to a high tide of revolution.
3. The main-force troops would simultaneously fight and build, gradually increase the scale of their annihilating battles, and simultaneously fight and monitor the enemy's reaction in order to take timely steps to cope with them.
4. Consolidate, build, defend, and complete the liberated areas and base areas in the South, accompanied by endeavoring to restore and develop the economy in the North, build up the North economically and with regard to national defense, and be prepared to defeat the enemy's plots.

All of those things were intended to change the over-all comparison of forces to our advantage, while at the same time creating conditions, grasping opportunities, being prepared to coordinate the three strong fists (the main-force units and the rural and urban forces, unexpectedly and rapidly change the situation, prevent the enemy from reacting, and win the greatest possible victories for the revolution.

In order to carry out that policy, the Military Commission emphasized the following :

1. An urgent, basic requirement during the next several years would be to win control for the people, win mastership in the lowlands, liberate, and gain firm control of, the mountain region, set up small enclaves in enemy-controlled areas, gradually win mastership in the cities, develop the status and strength of the revolution in the South, and cause us to grow stronger and the enemy to weaken.
2. It was necessary to firmly grasp the offensive strategic concept, resolutely counterattack and attack the enemy, and take the initiative in all regards. It was necessary to apply the slogans and modes flexibly, on the basis of the specific condition in each period of time and in each area.

In the highly populated lowlands, where the enemy were pacifying and land-grabbing, we had to attack and counterattack to defeat them, emphasize the

offensive, and make the areas temporarily occupied by the enemy to gradually transform the contested areas into liberated areas, and advance the enemy-controlled areas to contested or liberated areas.

In the mountain region, we would launch counterattacks and attacks and defeat the enemy's land-grabbing attacks, while attacking and wiping out the remaining strong points, expanding the integrated land areas, and solidifying the liberated areas.

In the areas behind areas behind enemy lines we had to take the initiative in attacking to destroy airfields, supply depots, rear-area bases, staging bases for military operations, and the roads used by the enemy to attack us.

3. It was necessary to closely combine several operational modes:

Maintaining and developing people's war in localities in highly populated, prosperous lowland areas, fight on a small scale, on a medium scale, continuously, and extensively, and organize combined campaigns on small and large scales, in order to fulfill the central mission of destroying the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing plan, win control of the people, and win mastership in the highly populated, prosperous areas.

Stepping up medium-scale and large-scale combat by the main-force units to annihilate part of the enemy regular forces and coordinating and creating conditions for people's war to develop in the lowlands. The main-force units would simultaneously fight and build, and be prepared to fight large scale annihilating battles when the opportunity arose.

Encouraging the development of the urban movement and advance to tightly surrounding the important cities and towns, especially Saigon.

We needed to make outstanding efforts and coordinate those three operational modes in order to, in future years, form three strong fists (the rural areas, the urban areas, and the main-force units). When the strategic opportunity arose, when the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy underwent a fundamental change, when the United States was encountering many difficulties at home and abroad, when our preparations had been completed, etc., we would, depending on the specific situation, determine the level necessary to win victory.

The Military Commission conference also decided upon a number of major tasks to carry out the strategic policy in the new phase, oriented toward the requirement of large-scale combat. It was necessary to strengthen the armed forces, especially the strategic mobile reserve force. The great rear area in the North would have to restore and develop the economy, while also positively mobilizing manpower and materiel for the great front line in the South. We had to pay attention to the political-ideological work, the task of organization, and training, in order to continually improve the all-round fighting quality of the armed forces.

When disseminating the resolution of the Military Commission to the leading cadres of the General Staff, after analyzing the revolutionary situation and

the new strategic policy, I emphasized the contents of the major tasks to which the strategic staff organ needed to pay attention (in addition to the permanent mission of guiding combat according to plan), with the goal of creating a new status and new strength before beginning the coming dry season.

In building up the armed forces, the General Staff needed to pay attention to transforming the main-force strategic mobile forces into strong corps which were organized and trained along the lines of large-scale combined arms combat, increase the battalions and regiments to full strength, send additional forces to the battlefields to serve as on-the-spot reserve forces, and increase the local forces by 150 to 200 percent.

[4 Apr 86]

[Text] In addition to the policy of actively building and consolidating the liberated areas and base areas in the South. The General Staff coordinated with the Rear Services General Department and Group 559 in consolidating the strategic western Truong Son route, extending the eastern Truong Son route, and building a system of supply depots and technical rear-services support bases for large-scale combat, and discussed with the Communications Command the development of a long-range telephone line connecting the battlefields with the Ministry of National Defense organs in the rear.

In the North, emphasis would be on consolidating Military Region 4, especially the southern part of it. All provinces had to prepare to mobilize and recruit troops, and it was still necessary to strengthen people's air defense, especially in the important military, economic, and political areas.

After the March 1974 resolution of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee was approved by the Political Bureau, the General Staff quickly sent urgent messages to the military regions in the South. At the beginning of April 1974 the Military Commission convened an all-army conference of high-ranking cadres (primarily cadres in the North) to explain and study the organization of implementation.

It had been a long time since I had attended such a large and happy meeting. All of the leaders and commanders of the military regions, armed forces branches, corps, general departments, and important departments were present at the guest house of the Ministry of National Defense at 33 Pham Ngu Lao, Hanoi.

The summer weather had just begun. The flamboyant trees along the streets of Hanoi had produced their first bright-red blossoms.

Having not met one another for a long time, we greeted one another warmly. We talked about combat, our work, and even our families. We recalled the past, spoke of the present, and also looked forward to the future, after the nation had won complete victory.

An atmosphere of enthusiasm enveloped the entire assembly hall. Everyone had recently listened to and discussed Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee and were now being briefed on the situation on the battlefields, the

present military missions, the developmental capabilities of the situation, and the policies and measures which had been adopted by the Military Commission in its March 1974 resolutions. Listening attentively and discussing enthusiastically, all localities, battlefields, armed forces branches, combat arms, units, and organs expressed complete agreement with Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee and the resolution of its Military Commission, and determination to organize their best possible implementation, according to their functions and missions.

On the final day, Ba and Sau Tho attended the conference. They delivered speeches and further analyzed the situation, the missions, and many matters requiring further clarification, especially the intentions of some nations vis-a-vis Southeast Asia, the developmental capabilities of the revolution in the South, and the strategic measures that would lead to the winning of complete victory in the future.

Also on that occasion, the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee and the Ministry of National Defense announced the decision of the Political Bureau, of the Chairman of the Council of State, and of the Premier to promote a number of colonels to the rank of general and promote a number of general officers. President Ton Duc Thang attended the conference and praised the accomplishments of our army, praised the cadres, and admonished everyone to further increase their determination to complete the enterprise of liberating the South and unifying the Fatherland. During the break periods the assembly hall resounded with warm salutations and intimate handshakes among comrades.

Happiness was mixed with worry. There was happiness because there was complete unanimity with the party's resolution regarding the revolution in the South, but there was worry because there was too much work and too little time. While the battlefields were stepping up combat, building up forces, and creating a new status and a new strength, the rear area had to carry out rapidly and on time a whole series of urgent tasks of strategic importance: recruiting troops, developing, training for large-scale battles, building the network of strategic and campaign roads, building a system of supply depots and rear-services support bases, recapitulating combat experiences, building up and developing the ranks of cadres, etc., to take advantage of strategic opportunities in a timely manner.

To more fully understand the actual situation and create favorable conditions for fulfilling the responsibilities and missions that were assigned, at that time going to the units and localities had become an urgent requirement.

During more than 10 years on the battlefield, there were many new matters which had to be fully understood in order to expand knowledge, guide the units, and especially guide the armed forces branches and combat arms in accordance with our army's new developmental requirements, including the recapitulation of combat experiences against the enemy's war of destruction.

During the last part of April and all of May 1974 I sat aside almost all of my time to visit the units and military regions in the North to grasp the situation and make additional enquiries, especially in order to correctly

evaluate all aspects of their potential and create a basis on which to participate in drafting strategic plans for the next several years.

The days I spent visiting the main-force units and localities, working with the leadership and command cadres, and meeting with people were truly useful. I spoke with them about the situation on the battlefields, well-fought battles, the people's spirit of stubbornly holding their own, and the soul of the people and soldiers on the great front line in the South who looked to the great rear area in the North night and day with confidence that they could, by working together, lead the revolution to final victory. As a person who had experienced years of combat in Military Region 5, then in the B2 theater, on behalf of the men at the front I expressed their gratitude for the rear-area localities and units for having gone all-out in aiding the south so that it could win one victory after another. I was very moved when I found that wherever I went the localities were busily mobilizing and recruiting troops for the battlefields, and the units were urgently preparing for the day when they would set out to fight in the South.

The air defense-air force commanders briefed me on experiences in using the air force and missiles against the enemy's war of destruction. When I visited the air-defense units I was introduced to a new type of missile, the "SAM 3". In the past, when resisting two wars of destruction waged by the U.S. imperialists, we had only "SAM 2" missiles.

When I visited the Navy I listened carefully to accounts of actions by frogmen, was briefed about capabilities for sending aid to the South by sea, and discussed how we would use the puppet naval forces after we won.

When I visited the military engineers I saw them assembling a bridge to ensure mobility by large units. I spoke with them about the rivers-and-canals terrain in Nam Bo and encouraged them to study ways to use equipment that was appropriate to that special type of terrain, to ensure mechanized movement.

In addition to the artillery units with which I had been familiar before going south, we now had a large number of artillery units, including mechanized long-range heavy artillery brigades. Those strategic reserve artillery forces would provide the primary fire support during the major campaigns that were about to be launched.

At the Armored Command I attentively listened to briefings on coordinated infantry-tank attacks in the initial battle at Lang Vay and the battles during the Route 9-Southern Laos and Quang Tri campaigns.

When I visited the Sapper Command a conference was being held to recapitulate the well-fought battles. Many southern cadres whom I knew were in attendance. I attended the conference for 2 days and contributed many opinions.

No matter what combat arm or armed forces branch I visited I exchanged opinions with the comrades in charge regarding the requirements and capabilities vis-a-vis aiding the battlefields when so ordered by the Supreme Command.

During the period in which I surveyed the units, armed forces branches, and technical combat arms, something that caused me to be at ease and enthusiastic was the ideological situation of the troops and the units' enthusiastic spirit of waiting to set out, which were results of large-scale combined arms training and a large corps of command and technical cadres who had good political and ideological ability and grasped the capabilities of the combat arm's technical equipment.

But something that caused me concern was that we still had too few heavy artillery shells. Our reserve forces had a total of fewer than 100,000 such shells. Some of them had already been distributed to the units. Most had been sent to supply depots south of Route 9. There were practically none left in the rear echelon supply depots in the North. What could be done to have sufficient firepower for the large campaigns, especially when fighting enemy troops defending large bases, municipalities, cities, and towns. That problem needed to be reported promptly to the Military Commission and the Rear Services General Department so that they could work together in solving it.

When I visited the Ta Ngan and Huu Ngan military regions, I sought to understand their troop mobilization capabilities. The number of recently mobilized troops was truly large. For example, the Ta Ngan military region's population was about 7 million, but during a 10-year period (1964-1973) the provinces sent nearly 560,000 troops to the battlefields, i.e. 8 percent of their population. That was a very significant figure which reflected the sense of responsibility and the strong spirit of sacrifice of the entire population and of each family vis-a-vis the sacred obligation of the great rear area toward the great front line.

The troop recruitment situation in the Red River delta caused me to think was the very great requirements of the battlefields in future years. What could be done to continue to mobilize troops to take advantage of the strategic opportunity in a timely manner, while the on-the-spot mobilization capabilities in the South were still very limited. Furthermore, the matters of winning control of the people and creating condition for the people to break the enemy's control in the South in order to mobilize large on-the-spot forces had become increasingly more urgent requirements which could, along with the forces sent from the North, fulfill the requirements of the rapid development of the revolution and revolutionary war in the South.

When I went to Military Region 4 I carefully studied troop deployments in the southern part of the military zone, and paid special attention to inspecting the coastal artillery positions of the military region and the localities. While returning via Tinh Gia District I went to inspect an alert exercise by a coastal artillery unit. The unit's command organization was quite good. The comrades in the district party committee had been very much concerned with building up the self-defense militia forces to coordinate with the main-force units in defending the coast.

When visiting the 1st Corps I sought to gain detailed knowledge of all aspects of the situation. That corps had been the first to be formed, 10 years previously. The formation of that original corps once again proved our party's wisdom and demonstrated the inevitable development of war and the

inevitability of large-scale combat. The actual situation in the 1971-1972 period showed that the form of organizing and using independent or dependent divisions was no longer appropriate, but that it was necessary to create and develop the role of fists that were stronger and larger than divisions, for only then could we fulfill the strategic mission of annihilating the large, well-equipped regular units of the enemy within a relatively short period of time. Those fists were the strategic reserve corps, with relatively modern equipment, great assault force, strong firepower and a high degree of mobility. The 1st Corps was the first corps, so it was not surprising that its units included some of our army's first main-force units: the 308th Infantry Division and the 45th Mechanized Artillery Regiment. I recalled the period of the anti-French resistance war, when the enemy closely followed the movements of those units. If they knew that the 308th Division was in a certain area they predicted that we would launch a large-scale attack there. We called the 308th the "steel division." It was awarded the honorific title "Vanguard Division, and the 45th Artillery Regiment was awarded the designation "Ever-Victorious Regiment."

[7 Apr 86]

[Text] During that time, under the guidance of Tran Van Quang, the operation and militia departments completed a recapitulation of anti-pacification experiences. On the basis of the actual battlefield situation during the anti-U.S. resistance period, especially since the Paris Agreement, including the experiences of the soldiers and people of Military Region 9, which had been presented by comrade Le Duc Anh in February 1974, the General Staff drafted a summary report which was rich in both practice and theory, and which would be presented at the coming conference. The report was approved by Van and Dung. Then the conference recapitulated the anti-pacification experiences that had been organized at the end of May 1974. Representatives of the southern battlefields came north to participate in the conference and contributed many additional very valuable and rich experiences. The lessons that were isolated by that important conference were the necessity of fully understanding the viewpoint of revolutionary violence and the strategic offensive concept; the necessity of continually ensuring that the armed forces were combat-ready under all circumstances; the necessity of continually organizing the mass forces and party chapters at the basic level, on the basis of which to develop the militia and guerrilla forces and add to the local troops; the necessity of, in each period of time, promptly discovering and correctly evaluating the new plots and schemes of the enemy, especially when the war was undergoing major turning points; the necessity of knowing how to apply appropriate struggle slogans and modes, depending on the specific local situation; and the necessity of continually developing the strength of both the armed and political forces and the strength of all three spearheads, and taking the initiative in counterattacking and attacking the enemy. All of these things were intended to defeat the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing plans.

The actual situation all over the South at the end of 1974 demonstrated the important significance and practical effect of that conference with regard to breaking up the enemy's pacification and opposing their land-grabbing, and to creating a new status and strength for us.

A mission of special importance to the General Staff before that advent of the dry season was to complete the basic operational plan to submit to the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee.

Immediately after the issuance of the resolution of the 21st Plenum of the Party Central Committee and the October 1973 resolution of the Military Commission, the Central Team of the Operations Department prepared a strategic plan titled "The Operational Direction for 1973-1975" to serve as a basis on which to prepare for the March 1974 conference of the Military Commission. After the Military Commission conference, in May 1974, the Operations Department completed a draft report titled "Outline Study of a Plan to Win Victory in the South."

After studying that outline and seeing the matters that needed to be added to be appropriate to the developing situation on the battlefields, on 18 July 1974 the Commander in Chief, on the basis of the guiding thought of the Political Bureau, directed me and the operations organ to study and complete the basic strategic plan so that it could be presented for approval by the Political Bureau at the end of September.

To help the organ understand the intention of the Political Bureau, he expressed a number of basic opinions on drafting the strategic plan:

1. It was necessary to review the development of the situation on the battlefields since the end of 1973. Because the battlefields had done a good job of applying the offensive concept and resolutely counterattacked and attacked the enemy, and because the rear area had stepped up the transporting of supplies and reinforcement to the battlefields, a new status and a new strength had clearly begun to take form. It was necessary to enter deeply into studying, analyzing, and evaluating the new elements that had been created, to create a basis on which to make strategic decisions.

2. On the basis of the initial changes in the comparison of forces and the battlefield situation, it was necessary to draft a two-phase basic plan.

In the first phase we would win a victory of decisive significance. During that period we would completely change the comparison of forces on the battlefields. We would become stronger than the enemy military and politically, control most of the rural and mountainous areas, and create the capability to set up a coalition government.

During the second phase we would, on that basis, develop to the level of a general offensive and general uprising and win complete victory.

3. With regard to selecting the strategic direction, during the first phase we should select two areas, the Central Highlands and eastern Nam Bo. Those two strategic areas were very important and decisive. The most decisive area was eastern Nam Bo, but only when we had certain conditions. In those two strategic areas we had to carry out feints, create the element of surprise, and not reveal too many of our forces too early, otherwise the enemy could

take defensive measures. For the immediate future the main-force units should operate only a moderate scale.

4. It was necessary to have a separate plan for the North, one that was tied in with the plan for the South. It should concentrate on two missions: mobilizing aid--both manpower and technical materials--for the South, and preparing for and being in on guard against a renewed war of destruction, while preparing an operational plan to cope with the eventuality of the enemy carrying out an amphibious landing on the coast in southern Military Region 4.

5. With regard to building forces, it was necessary to grasp the requirement of increasing combat quality, pay attention to resolving the problem of ensuring rational organization, determine a rational table of organization, determine a ratio among the armed forces branches and combat arms, to be appropriate to the actual number of troops and capabilities for mobilizing troops in the near future, and draft a plan to actively supplement the corps of cadres to fulfill the requirements of the strategic missions during the coming period.

6. With regard to fighting methods, it was necessary to disseminate more deeply and broadly the recently recapitulated anti-pacification experiences, organize study of the combat experiences of the main-force units in attacking the enemy subsectors, district seats, cities, and battle groups, and experiences in creating large units to fight large-scale combined-arms battles to annihilate enemy divisions.

7. It was necessary to study a plan to combine national defense with the economy, including organizing troops to participate in economic construction and preparing to restore the railroad line leading south from the southern part of Military Region 4.

My first thought after receiving the directive of the Commander in Chief was to grasp the newest, most comprehensive situation to create a basis on which to supplement and complete the strategic plan.

Dung was tired and was resting in a foreign country. Tan, the other deputy chiefs of staff, and I exchanged opinions, listened to reports by departments of the General Staff and, along with representatives of the Rear Services General Department, needed to evaluate the general situation during the past half-year. The answer that had to be found was a new status and new strength on the battlefield, on the basis of which to draft a strategic plan for the next few years.

A matter that arose after the recent 1973-1974 dry season activity cycle was the transformation in the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy and the beginning of a change in the war situation to our advantage.

Enemy documents show that at the beginning of 1974 were still subjective when setting the goals for their pacification and land-grabbing plan, for building up the puppet army, and for economic restoration.

The enemy forces were still large, they still had concentrated air and artillery support, and they still had many outposts in the rural areas, so they still controlled a number of highly populated areas, and were still able to plunder manpower and materiel for the war. But with regard to combat activities the enemy's weakness became increasingly clear. After we began our activity cycle, especially after March 1974, there arose a general situation on the battlefields of the enemy resisting us passively. Although the enemy army was still large, it had been stretched out and forced to spread its defensive forces thin, its ability to counterattack was limited, its ability to relieve sieges had weakened, it used troops drop by drop, and its mobility had declined. There was an increasingly clearer contradiction between using troops for pacification and land-grabbing and concentrating forces to relieve sieges. The actual situation had demonstrated that the enemy's morale and fighting strength had declined, and wherever we attacked strongly they fled, especially, their regional forces and popular forces.

During the first months of the year the enemy tried to take a number of areas in Tay Son Tinh, Tay Tu Ngia, Dong Mo Duc, Dong Bac Duc Pho, and Kien Tuong in Military Region 4, but the enemy could not realize their intentions. The number of outposts we took was double or triple the number the enemy retook, and the area controlled by the enemy steadily shrank. Their pacification and land-grabbing plan, which had a strategic significance, was facing the peril of bankruptcy.

With regard to building forces, although the enemy used all schemes to conscript troops, in hopes of approximately maintaining their 1973 level, and began to organize village military subsectors, the first half of 1974 showed that the enemy army was experiencing a rapid decline, its desertions were increasing, the total troop strength was tending to decline below that of 1973, the regular and local battalions were under-strength, and its strategic mobile reserves, which were already insufficient, were brought in and concentrated in Military Region 1.

A matter worthy of attention was that although the enemy still had much technical equipment, their ability to use it was limited because there were insufficient facilities to repair it, there was a shortage of technical personnel (the number of pilots met only 30 percent of requirements), the number of artillery shells used on the battlefields during the first half of 1974 decreased nine-fold in comparison to 1973, POL declined by 50 percent in comparison to 1972, of their 1,800 airplanes, only 1,100 were usable, etc. That situation directly affected the morale and activities of the puppet troops on the battlefields. That explains why in June 1974 Nguyen Van Thieu had to appeal for the puppet troops to "fight a poor man's war."

The U.S. economy was encountering difficulties because of the consequences of the Vietnam war. U.S. aid began to decline, which strongly affected the economy of the Saigon puppet regime. Its 1973 budgetary shortfall was 168 billion South Vietnamese dong (i.e. 37 percent of the budget), and although Thieu had to print 200 billion dong, in 1974 there was still a deficit of 98 billion (18 percent of the budget). Industrial activities declined by more than 40 percent, the cultivated agricultural area declined by between 30 and 40 percent, etc.

For our part, beginning in 1974 we operated more regularly and strongly on all battlefields. In both regions we made preparations in all regards to create a new status and new strength with which to begin the 1974-1975 dry season.

Beginning with the spring-summer season, we took the initiative in counterattacking the enemy and gradually retaking the areas they had taken in 1973 in the Military Region 5, Central Highlands, and Nam Bo theaters. In many places we even took many additional areas and liberated hundreds of thousands of people. Especially, in the western Nam Bo theater, during a 3-month period (April to June 1974) the soldiers and people of Military Region 9 wiped out or forced the abandonment of nearly 600 outposts.

Although the political struggle movement in the cities was not yet sufficiently strong and did not yet adequately coordinate with the military activities, guerrilla warfare deep within enemy-controlled areas was still weak, the development of political forces and local armed forces was still slow in comparison to the requirements, etc., but in general the war situation in mid-1974 had undergone a transformation that was increasingly to our advantage. Essentially, we had taken the strategic initiative and had taken and expanded offensive staging areas in the important strategic areas.

[8 Apr 86]

[Text] The liberated area had been expanded, the people's lives were becoming increasingly stable, and security and order were ensured. The people in the old populated areas and in the newly liberated areas were at ease in producing and had sufficient grain, even in areas in which the enemy plundered the rice and imposed economic blockades (such as in many areas in the Mekong Delta), and the cultivated area in the areas we controlled increased in comparison to 1973 (in Military Region 8 alone, during the first 6 months of 1974 there was an increase of 13,000 hectares). However, there was tardiness in purchasing grain and only 40 percent of the plan was attained.

Important results were attained in building up the armed forces in both regions, especially in strengthening the strategic reserves. Following the formation of 1st Corps (October 1973), two other corps were formed (2nd Corps, in Tri Thien, May 1974 and 4th Corps, in Nam Bo, July 1974), with full complements of technical combat arms. We had additional strong strategic fists and were prepared to meet the requirement of fighting large-scale annihilation battles of decisive significance when major strategic opportunities arose. A problem which caused the General Staff to continue to think of methods of solution was the failure to attain the goals that had been set for troop recruitment and the development of local armed forces in the South.

Speaking of large and strong units at the beginning of the 1974 summer season, I recalled the difficult times when we were creating the first main-force units in the South during the anti-U.S. resistance war, and recalled Nguyen Chi Thanh, a member of the Political Bureau and one of the leadership comrades who had devoted much effort to building up the armed forces in the South.

Uncle Ho and the Party Central Committee sent Thanh south in mid-1964, 10 years previously. Although he operated on the southern battlefields only 3 years, he made a deep impression on cadres at all levels as being a leadership cadre with seething revolutionary enthusiasm and a far and broad strategic outlook.

He was sent south when the U.S. war of aggression was changing from a "special war" strategy to a "limited war" strategy. The first U.S. units were present on the battlefield. The resistance war was facing an increasingly stronger developmental tendency. That explains why, on the basis of assimilating the guidance thoughts of Uncle Ho and the Party Central Committee, in the though there took form at an early date an awareness of great strategic importance: it was necessary to develop the armed forces into strong units to meet the increasingly greater requirements of concentrated combat, in addition to the increasingly greater development of guerrilla warfare. That also explains why command cadres who had much experience in concentrated combat, such as Le Trong Tan, Tran Do, Hoang Cam, Nguyen Hoa, etc., accompanied Thanh to the battlefield.

The people who worked closely with Thanh noted that he always weighed all aspects, military and political, in Vietnam and abroad, in order to reach correct conclusions regarding our status and strength, the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy, the battlefield situation, and the developmental tendency of the war. When he heard battle communiques and reports during briefings or conferences, he was concerned about the specific figures, regarding, so that he could think about and evaluate, the losses of the enemy and ourselves, the ratio of U.S. troops compared to puppet combattants and annihilated on the battlefiled. Something that he concluded at an early date, and stressed again and again, was that the U.S. troops came to South Vietnam in a status of defeat, so the question that was posed was how we should build up our armed forces, especially the main-force troops, to create additional condition for developing our strategic offensive status, especially during the last 6 months of 1965, when more and more U.S. troops were pouring in.

As soon as he reached the B2 theater Thanh and the theater's leadership and command cadres persistently and urgently guided the development of the main-force troops from a low level to a high level, and from small units to incrazingly larger units. With those newly built-up main-force units we won victories in the Binh Gia (winter-spring 1964-1965) and Dong Xoai (sumer 1965) campaigns.

From then on our victories in the South more or less had the characteristic of the main-force fists which Nguyen Chi Thanh contributed to creating at the beginning.

In July 1967, when working in Military Region 5, I was extremely moved and saddened when I was informed by the Central Committee that Thanh had passed away immediately before returning to the battlefield with a new strategic decision by the party. His passing was a great loss for the party, the armed forces, and the people, especially at a time when the resistance war was entering a decisive phase in both regions of the nation.

Seven years had passed quickly between Thanh's death and mid-1974. Our soldiers and people had passed through another phase that was full of challenges, and forced the Americans to withdraw, and were preparing a plan to attack to cause the collapse of the puppets.

The army's guidance and command cadres will always have profound recollections of comrade Nguyen Chi Thanh. Everyone saw in him, and emulated, his ardent enthusiasm, his creative dynamism, and his thoughts and actions. When in contact with cadres, with an open and sincere attitude he always listened to everyone's opinions, held democratic discussions, distinguished clearly between right and wrong, reached clear-cut conclusions, and with confidence in his echelon and the lower echelon won the confidence and respect of the cadres at all echelons.

Let us return to the matter of creating a new status and new strength on the battlefield in mid-1974.

The consolidation and development of the strategic transportation routes east and west of the Truong Son were pursued at an urgent pace, especially after the 21st Plenum of the Party Central Committee, along the lines of preparing for large-scale combat. The fact that the enemy had to cease bombing in Laos and the dry-season weather between the end of 1973 and mid-1974 were favorable for us to accelerate the development and completion of the two strategic routes east and west of the Truong Son range the east-west and detour route the campaign routes, and the oil pipeline deep into the main battlefields. We consolidated and expanded 5,920 kilometers of north-south roads; 3,930 kilometers of east-west roads, and 4,830 kilometers of detour roads, which could fulfill detour roads, which could fulfill the motorized transportation requirements in all weather.

In addition to building additional roads, there was the matter of sending aid to the battlefields. The requirement that has posed was to concentrate all aid on the Central Highlands, Nam Bo, and Cambodian battlefields.

In the first phase of the transportation campaign, from November 1973 to May 1974, the strategic rear services organ and Group 559 surpassed their norms by from 105 to 169 percent, transported nearly 100,000 troops south, took nearly all of the wounded and ill troops to the rear area, and brought south 25 tank, armored, and artillery units and hundreds of thousands of tons of military and civilian cargo, while drafting plans to prepare supply depots and plans to transport more than 500,000 additional tons of cargo to stockpile for plans for future years.

The second phase of the transportation campaign was being carried out urgently and there are prospects for surpassing the plan norms, including supplementary plans for our country and the two neighboring countries.

A whole series of supply depots and technical rear services installations were set up between Route 9 and eastern Nam Bo. The transportation routes east and west of the Truong Son were like two parallel arteries which connected the

rear area with the great front line and created a great source of strength for the battlefields.

In expanding the strategic transportation network, we at the same time combined the short-range and long-range missions, the mission of being prepared to fight on a large scale and the mission of comprehensively building up force the national defense, economic, military, and civilian missions, the ethnic minority mission and international obligations, etc.

In addition to the 100,000 reinforcements sent to the battlefields in 1973, nearly 80,000 troops were sent during the first 6 months of 1974. Many front-line units were brought up to full strength (main-force battalions, 400 to 500 men, regiments 1,800 to 2,000 men, and local battalions 300 to 350 men), and the number of concentrated troops increased to about 400,000 (our main-force troops--on the battlefield--approximately equalled that of the puppet main-force troops). At the same time, conditions were created for the battlefields to have on-the-spot reserve forces. A new feature in the troop transfers in 1974 that was worthy of attention was that the number of troops delivered attained a higher ratio and a faster rate than during any previous period. If in mid-1973 the highest of troops delivered was 95 percent, the minimum was 83 percent, and the average was 91.8 percent, the ratio during the first 6 month of 1974 was 99.3 and many battalions attained 100 percent. Furthermore, the reinforcements sent to the battlefields during the last part of 1973 and the first part of 1974 included all kinds of forces, including infantry battalions and complete technical combat arms, which had undergone basic training for the full training period and with comprehensive contents, along the lines of large-scale combined arms combat.

Working with the state planning organs made us very enthusiastic because the people in the North of our country were making all-out efforts and had achieved many important accomplishments in overcoming the serious consequences of two wars of destruction waged by the enemy. After only a year, the total social output in 1973 was already greater than in 1965, and the total value of industrial output was 12 percent greater than in 1972.

Our state was also investing large amounts of manpower, facilities, and materials in economic and cultural construction and development in the liberated areas in the South.

When we reviewed the contents of the work of creating a new status and new strength which the General Staff had discussed with the general departments and Group 559 to submit to the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee in 1974, we were pleased to learn that research by the strategic staff organ to help the upper echelon make strategic preparations in all respects had improved and was in greater depth.

The outstanding efforts on the part of our troops and people at the front and in the rear during the past year had caused the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy to undergo a clear transformation and the situation on the battlefield to undergo a transformation that was increasingly to our advantage.

The soldiers at the front resolutely counterattacked and attacked the enemy's pacification, land-grabbing, and siege-relief operations, created a new strategic status in many key areas, and forced the enemy into a status of passive resistance. As soon as the liberated area was expanded it was solidly consolidated. Notable results were attained in developing the economy and building rear-services bases in the liberated areas and along the strategic route.

The system of strategic and campaign roads, both east and west of the Truong Son, developed rapidly and became increasingly complete, extending from western Tri Thien to Route 14 and the western parts of the lowland provinces of Military Region 5, and from west of Sa Thay to Duc Lap, O Rang, and Bu Gia Map, causing the enemy to be interdicted strategically, and giving us the capability of motorized transportation in all weather, in order to move close to the strategic objectives in many areas.

[9 Apr 86]

[Text] Important results were attained in building up the armed forces. They included the overfulfillment of troop recruitment norms by the localities in the North; the development of the local, militia, and guerrilla forces in the South, which had begun to undergo a transformation in some areas; the creation of many new units and the development of the strategic reserve main-force units to the scale of many corps, in addition to the technical combat arms which were being built up and trained along the lines of large-scale combined arms combat; the sending of reinforcements to the battlefields to rapidly strengthen the forces at the front, etc. The actual situation during the 1974-1975 dry season demonstrated that the development of those forces on a large scale would result in the formation of strong strategic fists in many important areas during the first part of 1975, and the formation of large columns which would advance into the enemy's lairs during the final strategic war-deciding campaign.

With regard to military science and art, the staff organ made new advances in studying methods to attack the enemy. On the basis of grasping the enemy's new plots and organizations--the "Phoenix" organization, the militarization of the control system at the village level, the strengthening of the system of subsectors and district seats, the pacification operations, and the pacification and land-grabbing operations, which increasingly had a combined nature, and the enemy's increasingly large-scale siege-relief operations. The General Staff coordinated with the battlefields in reaching correct conclusions about our main-force troops' fighting methods, and on coordination among the forces and the three spearheads, in order to completely defeat the pacification scheme which Thieu regarded as the number-one, central mission of the Saigon army in 1974.

When we reviewed all aspects since October 1973, and especially since the Military Commission Conference in March 1974, we felt extremely enthusiastic. For the first time, within a short period of time, we had created a new strategic status, which was increasingly to our advantage, and a new force which was becoming more and more powerful, before beginning the 1974-1975 dry season.

The new status and new strength that had created at the front and in the rear area proved that Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee and the March 1974 resolution of the Military Commission, which had been approved by the Political Bureau, were entirely correct. That new status and new strength were the combined results of the heroic, resolute, intelligent, and creative combat by the armed forces and people on the great front line in the South, who confronted the enemy troops night and day, and were also the combined results of the revolutionary will and spirit of sacrifice of the people in the great rear area in the North, who continually contributed manpower and materiel to the heroic great front line.

That new status and new strength were also a very important basis on which the staff organ drafted its strategic plan for the next few years and the 1975 strategic operations plan.

Chapter Four

The Strategic Plan

Once we had the factors for studying, drafting, and putting the finishing touches on the basic strategic plan, we and the Central Team of the Operations Department reviewed the draft plans that had been prepared in advance. The first questions that were posed were when how, in view of our subjective capabilities and objective demands, could we make a final decision, and how could we achieve the element of strategic surprise and win the greatest possible victory?

During the past several years there had been various coincidences: very four years, on the occasion of the U.S. presidential election, we had launched a major strategic offensive on all battlefields in the South (1968 and 1972). This time should we select the year 1976? Some people were of the opinion that we should not follow that fixed pattern, for the enemy could take precautions and make advance preparations. But if we moved earlier, i.e. in 1975, could we complete our preparations in time? And if we waited until 1977, would it be too late? The question was how to create the strategic opportunity when it arose. It was necessary to grasp the objective situation and step up our subjective efforts in order cause the strategic opportunity to ripen.

While discussions were continuing, on 20 July the secretariat of the Party Central Committee informed us that the General Secretary, who was resting at Do Son, had invited us to "discuss the situation and coming mission--remember to bring along maps." We understood his intention as being to discuss the strategic plan, a matter about which the members of the Political Bureau were thinking in order to prepare for the coming conference in September. Le Trong Tan and I made the trip, along with comrade Vo Quang Ho, deputy head of the Operations Department. During the meetings held by the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, Ho was responsible for serving as the recording secretary, and then, on the basis of the resolution, participating in drafting the plan.

We traveled in separate vehicles at different times to avoid the "curious" eyes of the enemy. During the last years of the war foreign spies had monitored every movement of the key cadres of the strategic staff organ.

Before we set out, Van contributed several additional opinion that should be reported to Ba.

On the morning of 21 July we arrived at Do Son. As we traveled along Route 5 that morning the sun seemed to rise earlier and shone directly on the hood of our car.

After we arrived and met with him, we were clearly aware of his intentions. We had guessed correctly: he wanted to contribute and exchange opinions for

consideration by the staff organ, to help prepare and draft the strategic plan. The working method was still to pose questions and exchange opinion so that we could report fully on the situation and understand strategic his strategic thinking and prepare a report to be presented at the coming Political Bureau conference.

He posed three major problems:

1. Evaluating the situation of the enemy and ourselves, in the past and at present, in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.
2. Our strategic direction in 1975 and for the next few years in the South.
3. The matter of building and defending the North.

On the basis of the matters he had brought up, we reported on the major tasks that were being carried out, monitored, and guided. The staff organ had just held a conference on isolating experiences regarding attacks against pacification, and was carrying out two activity campaigns on the battlefields, including preparations for the Thuong Duc battle in Military Region 5 and the second phase of the strategic transportation campaign by Group 559, which would conclude in September 1974. We reported on all aspects of the strategic preparations--building rear services bases in Tri Thien, the Central Highlands, Military Region 5, and Nam Bo--and on the results attained in recruiting troops, building up forces, and carrying out the first military training cycle, and the results attained in aiding the battlefields during the past 6 months. All of those preparatory tasks were aimed toward the requirements of large-scale combined arms combat.

Before reporting to Ba on the political infrastructure and movement in the cities and their outskirts, especially on winning control of the population in the Mekong Delta and the summer campaign in Military Region 5, which was coordinated with the Central Highlands front, we reported on the general situation, with accompanying maps, and clearly proved that the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing campaign (which Thieu regarded as their central, number-one mission for 1974) was being defeated by us, step by step, on the battlefield, and that our soldiers and people had crated an increasingly advantageous status and strength on all fronts.

We reported on the political struggle movement in Saigon. A new feature was an alliance among 200 trade unions in all sectors and circles in a "General Federation of Labor," which struggled against lay-offs and U.S. violence. However, because the enemy had strengthened their control apparatus, the organization of political bases in the cities and the outskirts was still developing slowly.

Meanwhile, in the Mekong Delta our status and strength were developing well. In Military Region 8, although we had not regained all of the enemy's Military Region 4 we had repulsed the enemy from the center of Dong Thap Muoi and set up many new penetration bases in My Tho, Ben Tre, Sa Dec, and An Giang, and especially had moved up to destroy the enemy's resettlement area in Dong Thap and taken a large area around Cho Gao. Military Region 9 was still

outstanding. Within a period of 6 months we had knocked out of action 41,000 of the enemy (11,000 of whom were disintegrated, wiped out five battalions, 50 companies, 1 battle group, and 1 river boat squadron, inflicted damage on 6 battalions and 1 river boat squadron, destroyed 148 vehicles (83 M113's), sank 78 ships, destroyed 59 artillery pieces, wiped out 228 positions, forced the surrender of 9 outposts, used the three spearheads in the villages and hamlets, with the support of main-force troops, forced the abandonment of 562 posts, and caused mutinies in 8 posts. Of the 807 posts we took, the enemy could retake only 330. We liberated 312 hamlets (seven villages were completely liberated) and 280,000 people, thus increasing the number of people in liberated and contested areas to 1,110,000.

On the basis of those actualities, we had a basis on which to report to Ba the conclusion that had been drawn by COSVN in June, with which we agreed, that the enemy had been defeated in their plot to grab highly populated areas and consolidate the areas under their control, especially around Saigon and in the Mekong Delta, and that we still held the base areas and guerrilla enclaves in eastern Nam Bo and around Saigon, had regained nearly all areas occupied by the enemy since the agreement, and had restored the status quo existing prior to 28 January 1974, while at the same time adding new liberated areas in Go Cong, Cho Gao, My Tho, Bac Lieu, Soc Trang, the central area of Dong Thap, which connected the liberated areas south and north of Route 4, the U Minh and Nam Can bases, and the central parts of four provinces along the Hau River (14).

One thing that could be affirmed was that during the recent dry season we had won victories and were developing in an upward direction, while the enemy had been defeated and were on a downward slide. During the current rainy season we had many advantages and capabilities to win victories greater than during any previous rainy season, and perhaps even greater than during the recent dry season.

Although the weather was about to become more difficult, we had to make greater efforts to step up our activities in all regards, and to create a new status and a new strength, with regard to both material and morale conditions, so that we could begin the 1974-1975 dry season with greater spirit and stronger forces.

We reported on the situation in the localities implementing Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee and the March 1974 resolution of the Military Commission, which had been approved by the Political Bureau: the party committee echelons and command cadres were very pleased and believed that those resolutions were "very accurate and timely," and the resolutions were rapidly passed down to the localities and units.

In implementing the above-mentioned resolutions, an outstanding feature was the utilization of the struggle slogans and modes under the specific conditions of each area, and the use of local political forces and armed forces. The main-force troops taking turns building up, training, maintaining combat readiness and fighting, and were resolutely attacking and counterattacking the enemy, defeating their pacification and land-encroachment

schemes, winning and maintaining control of the population, and defending and expanding the liberated area.

[10 Apr 86]

[Text] During the summer months, the fighting strength of our troops increased to an important degree in comparison to the first of the year. Those results reflect a process of victorious struggle in the consciousness and internal thought in some localities, to arrive at unanimity, do a good job of resolving the relationship between fighting the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing in the immediate future and building forces in the battlefield position in both the short range and the long range. On the basis of the results of the extremely great contributions of the people and the positive aid of the departments, sectors, and state organs, of the organs of the Ministry of National Defense and Group 559, which made all-out efforts to correctly carry out the plan to transport cargo to battlefields and the plan to build strategic roads, including the campaign roads which went deep into each battlefield. The conference convened by the General Staff to isolate experiences regarding anti-pacification attacks clarified many matters regarding our guidance, slogans, modes, and fighting methods, especially the combining the three spearheads in the villages and hamlets.

Ba contributed the opinion that it is necessary to study what fighting method to disintegrate the enemy's administrative apparatus. In the lowlands, it was necessary to use brigades or divisions to attack to break off whole segments and open up whole areas. Since Saigon was the enemy's center, it was necessary to enable our forces to isolate it.

After listening to reports during the afternoon of the 21st, Ba expressed his thoughts about matters relevant to his thoughts about matters relevant to the strategic plan and the strategic opportunity, and especially the situation in the world and in Southeast Asia relevant to our resistance war in the South. In general, he said the following:

In considering Vietnam, it is necessary to consider all of Indochina and Southeast Asia. If in the past we thought that the United States was sending troops into South Vietnam only to add another link to the strategic chain surrounding our camp in the Far East, now the matters of Vietnam and Indochina were becoming more prominent in southeast Asia, a region in which many countries, including China and Japan, were competing for influence. At one time they thought that the United States could use military means to dominate South Vietnam. But now the United States had been defeated and had to withdraw its troops. The Vietnam war had clearly weakened the United States. Meanwhile, the other nations with designs on Southeast Asia were not yet strong or ready. They were very afraid that the three Indochinese countries would be victorious and would become stronger. The problem that was posed for us was how to create the opportunity to win victory earlier, before those countries were prepared to intervene. Although they did not openly say so, they met one another in a nefarious plot toward Southeast Asia. China was revealing more and more clearly its aspiration to advance south, especially after the United States was defeated and had to withdraw its troops. China feared that if we won and became stronger we would impede its advance down

into Southeast Asia. In its status of defeat, the United States was also willing for China to expand south, in hopes of stopping the other large countries from gaining influence. The Paracel Islands affair in January 1974 was an example. Therefore, at that time, when those countries were not yet able to carry out their ugly designs, the matter of creating, and taking advantage of, an opportunity to win complete victory, was becoming increasingly urgent. When the South was liberated, and our 50 million people were independent and unified, those countries would no longer be capable of carrying out their designs on Indochina in particular and on Southeast Asia in general.

We had to adopt a fighting method that would allow us to win a big victory quickly, so that the puppets could not react in time and the countries inclined toward intervention could not intervene in time. If that was to be accomplished it was necessary to prepare to launch a final general offensive-general uprising within a month or two after a strategic opportunity arose.

If we were to fight on a large scale and rapidly, and win a big victory, we had to create new strength and use corps to annihilate enemy divisions. Many countries thought that that we were incapable of organizing large, highly mobile forces, i.e. that we were incapable of fighting on a large scale. We had to think about how to win a decisive victory within a short period of time. We would thus have the element of surprise not only with regard to the puppets and the United States, but also with regard to the other countries which had ugly designs on Indochina and Southeast Asia.

When he took a break to take a drink of water and do some thinking, we reported in greater detail on our strategic main-force reserves, which were being strengthened, on the two strategic routes that were being expanded east and west of the Truong Son, on the mechanized mobility capabilities of the strategic units, etc.

Ba continued:

"That is good. We have a basis on which to study large-scale annihilation fighting methods on the campaign and strategic scales. It was necessary to organize the strategic reserve forces into strong, highly mobile corps which could annihilate enemy divisions and combine annihilating battles with routing large numbers of enemy troops. With regard to the organization and use of forces, it was necessary to develop combined strength. That is a mathematical exercise the answer to which must be have a higher practical and theoretical basis.

"With regard to the concentrated troops of the military regions, it is necessary to organize full-strength, strongly equipped battalions into very rapidly moving spearheads (15) to penetrate deeply behind enemy lines. At the same time, divisions or brigades equipped with artillery and mortars must be sent to fight in the lowlands.

"If, during the coming year (1975), the urban movement becomes stronger and we control the rural areas, the United States will have to replace Thieu in order

to salvage some of the clauses of the Agreement which are still advantageous to them.

"You must study and thoroughly understand that direction, and must make preparations so that in 1975 we can give rise to a new spirit and a new strength."

After the break, Tan reported on the primary intentions of the General Staff with regard to each theater:

In the Mekong Delta, all-out efforts must be made to take more than posts, and 2,000 more in 1975, in order to create integrated segments. As for winning control of the population, we would increase the population of the liberated areas to 3 million, and 2 million people in the contested areas. If that was to be accomplished, it was necessary to annihilate battalion-sized subsectors and wipe out two or three battalions, or an enemy regiment, trying to relieve them. That would ensure the opening up of corridors from the border down to military regions 8 and 9. The Supreme Command planned to reinforce Ben Tre and Tra Vinh with a regiment each, and to, during 1974, reinforce the Mekong Delta with a total of 10,000 troops, send additional weapons to attack posts, armored vehicles, river boats, and airplanes. The local armed forces had to simultaneously operate and fight, to attack the outposts and attack the enemy troops going to relieve them. We felt that it was necessary to strengthen the organization and command of combined campaigns in each area, organize additional sapper units, and attack more strongly attack the bases and supply depots in enemy-controlled areas.

In Military Region 5, it was necessary to annihilate the enemy and expand the mountainous region in western Quang Nam. The Supreme Command had just been informed that we had wiped out the Nong Son strongpoint and annihilated four enemy battalions, including a Ranger battalion. It was necessary to wipe out the remaining strongpoints in the mountain region. In 1975 we had to expand into the lowland area and liberate an additional million people.

In the Central Highlands, we had to eliminate the isolated strongpoints in the north and the remaining strongpoints in the west, in order to control the jungles-and-mountains areas, consolidate the strategic route, and create a corridor connecting the southern Central Highlands with eastern Nam Bo.

In the eastern Nam Bo theater we had to expand the area above Route 14 and move down to connect with the Bien Hoa and Military Region 6 areas to form an integrated base area. We had to keep and expand the contested areas around Saigon to surround it, move close to it, and infiltrate the city, while interdicting Route 1 between Saigon and Phan Thiet and Route 20 between Saigon and Da Lat.

With regard to the strategic reserve forces, the High Command was studying the corps' mobility capabilities and organizing additional corps on the spot.

With regard to fighting methods, in addition to gaining experience in fighting pacification and studying the experiences in attacking subsectors and district seats, the General Staff assigned the Military Science Institute the task of

cooperating with the High-Level Military Graduate School in studying the art of campaigns and large-scale combined arms combat under the present conditions. In 1974 the training of main-force troops would also be oriented toward meeting the requirements of combined arms combat and large-scale annihilation battles.

Following Tan's presentation, I added the following:

Between then and the end of 1974 we would go all-out to wipe out six or seven subsectors and five or six battle groups, add 3 to 3.5 million people to the liberated areas in the South, and about 5 million people in the contested areas. If we did so the situation would undergo a major transformation and in 1976 the theaters would have many capabilities to develop and create a new, very solid status and strength.

A matter worthy of concern at that time was the urban movement. Its political base was still weak and the political campaign had not yet developed strongly. But we were confident that military victories would impact strongly on the political movement, and that if the urban movement was advanced in 1975, it was certain that in 1976 the situation would undergo a very great transformation. At that time we would be able to advance rapidly and decisively within a few months.

Ba added:

It was necessary to make preparations so that in 1975 we could fight on either a medium scale or a large scale and wipe out enemy divisions. We had to fight in such a way as to both annihilate the enemy and cause their forces to disintegrate. Whenever there were conditions for winning a big victory we had to do so. But we had to realize that that is a complicated matter, not a simple one. We had to take the enemy by surprise and cause them to weaken and disintegrate within a brief period of time. If that was to be accomplished, with regard to our battlefield position we had to pay more attention to interdicting the enemy and expand our activities behind their lines. With regard to forces, we could send in additional forces from the North to do economic work, build roads, and at the same time serve as reserve forces.

Ba devoted the remainder of the time that afternoon to making additional comments about the political proselytizing work. He believed that the enemy in Saigon had never been as weak politically and economically, or had as many internal contradictions, since 1954. During the Diem period the enemy had been strong because we had withdrawn our forces. When we became stronger, Diem fell but the Americans came in immediately, so the enemy remained strong. Now that the U.S. troops had withdrawn the puppets could not grow weaker. There existed in Saigon not only our forces but also the third force, which included well-known progressives. If we were skillful we could develop those forces and promote the movement. In 1975 we definitely had to strengthen the urban movement. The situation in the United States was very chaotic: it was possible that Nixon would fall and be succeeded by Ford, who would seek ways to work toward a settlement with us. We had to strengthen the urban movement to help create a new status and a new strength. In the urban movement at present, we had to pay attention to combining both forms of activity: secret

and open. Secrecy was a condition for preserving the party's existence and openness was a condition for developing the movement.

He stated that he agreed with us that the political movement was always affected by our military forces and was also stimulated by internal contradictions created by the enemy, i.e. by the objective situation. For example, Nixon falling, Ford succeeding him, the enemy replacing their lackeys, etc.

A very busy day passed very quickly.

Something that remained deeply imprinted in my mind after a day of discussion and thought was Ba's opinion about strategic opportunities. Clearly, the situation demanded that we act more urgently. The next few years would be a critical time and also afford the most favorable opportunity for winning a decisive victory. The longer we waited, the more complicated the situation would become. We had to have determination and make plans to fight on a large scale, to win victory rapidly so that the United States and the puppets could not react in time and so that the countries which schemed to do so could not have time to intervene.

[14 Apr 86]

[Text] On the following day, Ba had a good deal to say about economic construction in the North, on the socialist economic laws of advancing from small-scale production to large-scale production, on balancing industry and agriculture in the sphere of the district and on a national scale, on combining national defense with the economy and the economy with national defense, on the army participating in economic construction, etc.

But then, only a little later, he returned to the matter of the revolution in the south, for that was a very urgent, very great matter which continually attracted the thoughts of everyone who was responsible to the party, the people, and the fatherland.

We made further reports to Ba about a problem that had not yet been comprehensively and solidly resolved: the matter of heavy artillery shells. Large-scale combined arms combat and attacks on the cities and the enemy's large bases would require heavy artillery shells if we were to meet the requirements regarding large-scale annihilation battles. At that time we had only about 100,000 shells left. We were recovering the shell casings so that they could be repacked, and were improving production as much as we could. We recommended that Central Committee make efforts to obtain aid from the fraternal nations.

The General Secretary said that it was clear that China was attempting to pressure us. We would have to request aid from the fraternal nations, but still did not exclude China, if it would continue to give us aid. We would continue to reload the shells, improve production, and discuss additional ways to overcome the problem if we encountered difficulties in seeking aid.

During the last hour of the morning session that day (22 July) the meeting became a discussion revolving the matter of the decisive opportunity. It was foreseen that in 1975 there could appear a high tide, and the same time we foresaw a new development in 1976, prior to the U.S. presidential election. By means of a decisive "coup" in 1976 we could force the enemy to accept a tripartite government. We foresaw that during the next few years we would definitely have to unify the nation. But we always had to prepare, if the unexpected happened, to step up the pace. Ba said, "If we could win a decisive victory during the next few years, that would be good, very good."

That afternoon, before we returned to Hanoi, Ba instructed us to "draft the strategic plan in such a way as to create a strategic opportunity, and be prepared to immediately exploit that strategic opportunity."

As soon as our vehicle left Hai Phong and the sea breezes, my attention was again drawn to the No 1 problem: finding the necessary elements so that I could, along with my comrades in the organ, draft and complete the strategic plan. I concentrated my thoughts on several variables, and had to find answers to them.

One was the possibility of U.S. intervention when we attacked on a large scale and the puppet army and puppet administration were threatened with collapse? We had many times thought that because the United States had withdrawn its troops and was in a state of chaos politically, economically, and socially, it was unlikely that would intervene again, especially with ground troops. But what was the possibility that it would intervene by using its air force and navy, at least along the coast? Something very worthy of concern was the possibility that it would intervene to a degree that would not be decisive but would cause us difficulties, a possibility we could not ignore.

Second, there was the question of whether a mass uprising should be coordinated with attacks by our main-force troops. We spoke of bringing into play the three strategic blows--by the main-force troops, in the rural areas, and in the cities--and coordinating them to create combined strength. But although the main-force troops were strong and had prospects for becoming even stronger, the political movement was still experiencing difficulties. In the rural areas, the enemy were militarizing their control apparatus in the villages and hamlets. We had to step up our military activities and develop our political forces in such a way as to create conditions for the masses to arise. Winning control of the people to achieve mastery and winning mastery in order to gain control of the people was something with which we were always concerned. In the cities, the mass force and the third force were not yet strong, so we had to find ways to expand them extensively and make preparations so that the industrial workers would know how to take over the enterprises, so that the merchants would know how to take over the shops, and so that the civil servants would know how to take over the public offices, and be prepared to coordinate when our main-force units attacked on a large scale and when the peasants in the lowlands arose to create the strength to overthrow Thieu. Both theoretically and practically, it was necessary to pose the question of whether there should be a general offensive and general uprising or a general offensive and uprisings.

Third, there were the problems of the material-technical bases in general and artillery shells in particular. Heavy artillery shells were very necessary to fight large annihilating battles but we still had very few of them. Reloading them was only a stop-gap measure and did not meet technical standards or provide the quantities needed for large-scale combat. Economical use was also a measure: while fighting on small and medium scales we should not hastily fire many heavy shells, but should save them for the decisive periods. We also needed to capture guns and ammunition from the enemy and use them against the enemy. But by doing so could fulfill the need for artillery shells to fight large-scale battles?

In addition to those questions there was the question of when the opportunity would arise to win a decisive battle. As Ba said, that opportunity would arise when the main-force "fists" were ready and the political forces were sufficiently strong to master the rural areas and in the cities were prepared to carry out coordinated uprisings. In our previous draft plan we had estimated that we would win a decisive victory in 1976, and did not eliminate the possibility that we would not do so until 1977. Ba now recommended that we should win such a victory as soon as possible, for the longer it was delayed the more difficult the situation would become. What objectives would we have to attain to win victory step-by-step, and how should we prepare to take advantage of the strategic opportunity?

After Tan passed along Ba's guidance opinions to the members of the members of of the Central Team drafting the plan, I discussed all the things I had been thinking about with the team members and found that many of our thoughts coincided.

We began to review the old draft plan and supplemented and adjusted it so that it could be appropriate to the newest developments of the situation and Ba's recommendations.

During that period we received two important bits of information practically at the same time: we had taken Nong Son-Trung Phuoc and Que Son in western Quang Nam, Thuong Duc in western Quang Da, Minh Long and Gia Vut in western Quang Ngai, and Deo Ngang and Phu My in northern Binh Dinh; and Nixon had resigned and had been replaced by Ford. That information helped us reach important conclusions relevant to the supplementation and completion of the strategic plan.

During the fall of 1974, in July and August Military Region 5 would launch a campaign in five areas (Nong Son-Tien Phuoc, Thuong Duc, Que Son, Minh Long-Gia Vut, and Deo Nhong (Phu My).) In those five areas the General Staff would especially pay attention to attacking the Nong Son subsector and the Thuong Duc subsector and district seat.

The enemy forces at Thuong Duc and the key position occupied by that district seat reflected its role as a gateway to the Da Nang base complex. In addition to Nong Son, Tien Phuoc, and the other areas, our forces' annihilation of Thuong Duc and defeat of the counterattacks by the mobile airborne division, the backbone of the puppets, allowed us to affirm that the balance of forces on the battlefield had changed and our troops could attack the enemy in

fortified positions, wipe out clusters of enemy strongpoints and district seats, and defend the newly taken objectives. After the Thuong Duc battle we noted that the enemy troops were clearly becoming increasingly weak, their air and artillery support had declined, and the mobile troops had to be dispatched on a patch-work basis and drop-by-drop, and moved primarily by road. Thus they responded slowly and the morale of both the main-force and local troops had declined. A puppet major captured during that battle admitted that the Saigon army did not have sufficient airplanes to transport its troops, and its reinforcements were not only in short supply but had to move by land. In sum, after the Nong Son and Thuong Duc battles we could conclude that our mobile main-force troops had become superior to the enemy's mobile main-force units. That conclusion had a close relationship to our strategic intentions.

As we had foreseen, the internal ranks of the ruling circles in Washington had become increasingly split and divided. After the U.S. troops had been brought home and the wave of protest against Nixon over the Watergate affair had subsided for a time, another wave of protest arose in U.S. public opinion. The rejection of supplementary aid for the puppets, Thieu's appeal for the puppet army to "fight a poor man's war," the decline in their air support, artillery support, and mobility facilities, Nixon having to bitterly leave the White House, etc., were a string of events which clearly showed that the ability of the United States to intervene was becoming increasingly limited. However, it was necessary to continue to monitor the activities of Ford. The most recent announcements of the new president showed that the White House continued to adhere to the Nixon Doctrine without Nixon, and that the United States had not yet abandoned Thieu.

In the process of reviewing the draft strategic plan, the members of the Central Team, led by Le Trong Tan and then Can Van Khanh, quickly and unanimously evaluated the enemy and ourselves, as well as the international situation. The most energetic discussions revolved around several major matters, especially our strategic intentions and course of action. We discussed in detail goals, requirements, contents, and time frame of each step, foresaw the development of the situation, capabilities that may arise as each step was being taken, the implementation and methods of implementation, etc. Then we entered deeply into discussing the specific 1975 plan and the direction of the 1976 plan.

A requirement posed for 1975 was to achieve the element of surprise and wage a large, extensive offensive in order to:

1. Essentially defeat the enemy's pacification plan and gain control of additional land and population in the rural lowlands;
2. Reduce the enemy's total troop strength to a level of strategic significance;
3. Destroy and importnat part of the enemy's materiel reserves and attack their strategic routes;
4. Consolidate and fill out the liberated areas and base areas;

5. Build up our forces in all regards;
6. Expand the strategic corridor and network of strategic roads, and create staging areas near the municipalities, cities, and key bases;
7. Accelerate the movement in the cities, especially Saigon;
8. Essentially complete all preparatory tasks in order to take the initiative in carrying out a general offensive-general uprising should a strategic opportunity present itself early.

We gave specific instructions to each area with regard to the above requirements, along with the goals that had to be attained. We foresaw that 1975 would be divided into three activity cycles which would have specific goals, a primary direction, and a coordinating direction.

The process of carrying out the three cycles would be a process of building and developing our forces in the cities (especially Saigon, Da Nang, and Hue), stepping up military proselytizing, preparing strategic mobile forces, completing the plan to transport aid to the battlefields, and extend strategic roads to eastern Nam Bo and the campaign roads.

With regard to the direction of the 1976 plan, we foresaw three eventualities and struggle directions in each eventuality, to serve as a basis on which to draft a specific plan in the future. That plan would have to be based on the victories that would be won in 1975. Those three eventualities were:

1. The enemy would obstinately continue the war.
2. The enemy would agree to retreat a step and implement the agreement.
3. The opportunity for uprisings in the cities would arise early, in 1976.

The draft plan was completed on 26 August 1974. It was the seventh draft plan drafted by the Central Team (16) since the resolution of March 1974. However, it did not stop there. The draft plan was sent to the members of the Political Bureau and the standing committee of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, so that they could study it and offer recommendations. In August, the Chief of Staff returned from vacationing abroad. After listening to the report, he contributed many opinions in the course of completing the strategic plan. The Central Team continued to monitor the situation on the battlefields and listen closely to the initial opinions of the leadership cadres to make the necessary supplementations, after we had discussed matters with them and reached agreement.

[16 April 86]

[Text] Also during that time, during the last half of September, the General Staff received much information about the enemy, noteworthy among which was a report from the puppet General Staff to Thieu regarding projections in 1975.

According to that information, the puppets believed that if U.S. aid amounted to 1.4 billion dollars they would be able to control all the South; if the aid amounted to 1.1 billion dollars they would lose the northern half of Military Region 1; if the aid amounted to only 900 million dollars they would lose all of Military Region 1 and a few provinces in Military Region 2; if the aid amounted to 750 million dollars they would lose all of Military Region 1 and Military Region 2; and if the aid amounted to only 600 million dollars they could only control only the half of Military Region 3 south of Bien Hoa, and Military Region 4. The enemy also admitted that as of September 1974 they had about 1,000 aircraft which were inoperable because of shortages of fuel and spare parts.

According to that document, there were about 1 million enemy troops, including more than 150,000 noncombatants (and about 100,000 "ghost soldiers"). The troop conscription was becoming increasingly difficult to fulfill.

Because of the difficulties regarding military personnel, the puppet Joint General Staff planned to withdraw 25 to 30 percent of the isolated outposts which were difficult to supply and could not be held if we attacked.

Politically, there was information that the United States intended to work with a number of other large nations in convening a conference of relevant nations to seek a political solution for South Vietnam, to bring the third force (organized by the United States) onto the political stage in Saigon, and carry out a number of important provisions of the Paris Agreement.

We verified that information and reported it to a conference of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission so that they could have additional research material during the process of discussing and improving the strategic plan.

Before the conference began, the Operations Department posted the recent information on the combat situation on large maps, which were hung in the meeting room, including our attacks which wiped out the Nong Son strong point and the Thuong Duc district seat, and turned back the counterattacks of the enemy airborne brigades.

The conference of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission took place between 30 September and 8 October and was divided into two parts: during the first 2 days the participants listened to reports, then they met again on 5 October to discuss matters and issue a resolution. On that occasion Vo Chi Cong, who was then in the North, also attended the conference.

I reported on the situation during the past 9 months. Tan reported on the 2-year draft strategic plan and the 1975 strategic operations plan.

With regard to the enemy's situation, our situation, and the situation on the battlefield, the report of the General Staff, stated that the enemy forces were still large and although their air and artillery support were limited they were still strong, and their control apparatus was still able to dominate the people in areas they controlled.

In the course of 9 months of fierce fighting between ourselves and the enemy, the actual situation on the battlefield had clearly demonstrated that the "Ly Thuong Kiet--74" plan of the enemy was imperiled by bankruptcy. After April 1974 the battlefield situation had changed rapidly. The enemy were no longer capable of coping with our attacks and counterattacks. By means of specific data, the report attested to the fact that an important part of the enemy had been annihilated or disintegrated and an increasingly larger number of outposts had been annihilated or forced to surrender or evacuate. The enemy forces had been stretched out, were resisting passively, and no longer had mobile troops to support pacification and encroachment. Our liberated area was expanding rapidly and was being further consolidated in all theater, from Tri Thien and Military Region 5 to eastern Nam Bo and the Mekong Delta. Our network of strategic and campaign roads was becoming increasingly complete and had created an interdicting status which directly threatened the enemy-controlled areas.

The economic and financial difficulties of the Thieu puppet regime had clearly affected the military plans and morale of the puppet troops. Furthermore, due to the influence of our military activities on the battlefield and our correct and clever front policy, because we flexibly applied the struggle modes, and because of the enemy's brazen terrorism and suppression, dissatisfaction and opposition to the United States and Thieu on the part of many strata of people in the cities gradually developed. The CIA plotted to plant people to control the movement but could not achieve the desired effect.

With regard to evaluating the puppets' capabilities, the General Staff was of the opinion that they were not "saving their strength" but that their actual capabilities were very limited. They wanted to continue to strongly attack our strategic transportation routes and regain the areas they had lost, but were no longer able to do so. If the United States further reduced its aid the puppets would weaken even more rapidly. The sum of more than \$1 billion in aid which the United States intended to provide was regarded by the puppets as being too little in comparison to the needs of more than 1 million troops. Even if the United States added hundreds of millions of dollars it could resolve none of the basic problems.

With regard to the possibility of intervention by the United States, the Political Bureau had observed that the United States was no longer capable of sending in land forces, but we could not eliminate the possibility that they would intervene by using their air force and navy. But such intervention could not prevent the puppets from collapsing. That observation was still correct.

For our part, the past 9 months had demonstrated that although our troops' fighting methods had improved they were not yet good enough. It was necessary to further raise the level of large-scale combined-arms combat and our ability to attack enemy troops in fortified positions. During the Thuong Duc battle we attacked a district seat with many strong fortifications and although we annihilated the enemy on a rather large scale we did not do so very effectively.

In its report, the General Staff clearly presented the results of aid with regard to the troops, equipment, and materiel sent to the battlefields, for that was a matter which very much needed to be fully analyzed, with regard to both the recent results and future capabilities, to create a basis on which to draft the strategic operations plan and determine the goals that had to be attained during the next several years, especially 1975.

With regard to the coming struggle, the General Staff outlined two plans that were appropriate for two contingencies. The first was to overthrow Thieu, then set up a coalition government and gradually advance to winning complete victory. The second was to use military forces to strike a decisive blow and develop the attack until final victory was won.

The clear determination the contents of the various steps, and the development from one step to another, within those plans was very important because it would be the basis on which to make strategic decisions.

With regard to strategic measures, the General Staff recommended the following:

1. Continuing to disrupt pacification and expand the areas under our control by means of combined campaigns.
2. Launching main-force offensive campaigns to annihilate enemy regiments and divisions and expand the liberated area.
3. Interdicting the enemy at the strategic and campaign levels, by combat and by attacking roads, surrounding the enemy, military proselytization, and causing the enemy to disintegrate or separate themselves.
4. Stepping up the urban struggle to a high level and create conditions for bringing the third force into the open. If Thieu fell, we could form an alliance with them.
5. Cleverly carry out a diplomatic strategy to take advantage of internal contradictions within the enemy and restrict the United States militarily.

Finally, I reported additionally on the specific results of our efforts with regard to strategic preparations during the past 9 months in all regards: building up the liberated and base areas; expanding the system of strategic and campaign roads; capabilities for transporting aid to the battlefields; and building up the armed forces of both regions, especially the creation and training of main-force mobile strategic units along the lines of large-scale combined arms combat.

So that the Political Bureau could have a basis on which to plan the coming troop mobilization and recruitment campaign, I reported on the situation regarding the over-all troop strength and the troop strength on each battlefield, the forces not engaged directly in combat (disabled and ill soldiers, people, recently released by the enemy, troops engaged in production and economic construction, and the Route 559 forces), troops undergoing training as replacements, etc. With regard to capabilities for recruiting

troops in the near future, the report pointed out that the population of the North as 23.8 million, including 984,000 youths between the ages of 17 and 25. In order to have strategic reserve forces, I recommended that the Political Bureau draft 150,000 additional troops during the latter part of 1974 and 60,000 during the first part of 1975.

Tan reported additionally on the specific contents of the 2-year strategic plans and especially the 1975 strategic plan which had just been drafted by the General Staff. When making his report, he referred to the opinions which the members of the General Staff and the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission had expressed concerning the draft strategic plan.

With regard to strategic decisions, the General Staff recommended that the liberation of the South be completed during the 1975-1976 2-year period (not eliminating the possibility that it would have to be delayed until the first part of 1977).

In order to carry out that decision, the basic strategic plan had two basic steps:

Step 1 (1975): Achieve the element of surprise and launch large-scale and extensive attacks to:

1. Essentially defeat the enemy's pacification plan and annihilate and disintegrate an important part of the enemy troops (reduce the enemy troop strength to a strategically significant level, and liberate and master most of the rural areas in the Mekong Delta, in the outskirts of Saigon, and in the lowlands of Military Region 5 and Tri Thien).

2. Extend the strategic corridor from the western Central Highlands to eastern Nam Bo and to the three provinces in the southern part of Military Region 5, from Tay Ninh to Long An and the area southwest of Saigon, and from Kien Tuong to My Tho, and set up base areas and staging areas close to the municipalities, cities, and key bases.

3. Destroy an important part of the enemy's war facilities and economic potential and interdict their lines of communication.

4. Further the development of the urban movement.

5. Build up our forces, consolidate the liberated area, prepare the battlefield, and prepare conditions for Step 2.

Step 2 (1976): Carry out a general offensive and general uprising and completely liberate the South.

The 1975 strategic plan was divided into three phases:

Phase 1: From December 1974 to February 1975, a limited offensive. The primary activities would be in the Mekong Delta and eastern Nam Bo (the other theaters would be in the rainy season).

Phase 2: The primary phase. Between March and June 1975 a large-scale campaign would be carried out in the western Central Highlands theater, along with coordinating campaigns in eastern Nam Bo, northern Military Region 5, and Tri Thien. In the Mekong Delta we would continue to carry out attacks and uprisings, expand the liberated areas, and attack pacification.

Phase 3: Between August and October 1975. It would be the phase in which we would develop our victory by stepping up activities in Tri Thien and Zone 5, while also consolidating our forces and being prepared to carry out contingency plans.

With regard to the strategic direction and missions of each theater, the General Staff made the following recommendations:

Tri Thien-Quang Da would be a coordinating theater and would draw in and stretch out the enemy main-force units and cut Route 1, while attacking pacification and expanding our liberated areas in the Tri Thien lowlands and in the outskirts of Da Nang.

The lowlands of Military Region 5 (especially the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Binh Dinh) would be a theater in which we attacked pacification, liberated most of the rural areas, and carried out a strategic interdiction.

[17 Apr 86]

[Text] The Central Highlands (the focal point of which was the southern Central Highlands) were the primary theater of the main-force troops, one in which we would annihilate the enemy forces.

Nam Bo: the Mekong delta and the hinterland of Saigon were the primary battlefields, in which we would attack pacification in order to surround and isolate Saigon. Eastern Nam Bo was a main-force theater in which we would stretch out, draw in, and annihilate the enemy forces, expand the liberated areas, win control for the people, open up the Tay Ninh corridor, and coordinate with Military Region 8 in opening up the Kien Phong-Kien Tuong corridor and in creating staging areas near Saigon and My Tho and creating conditions for stimulating the urban movement.

In its draft, the General Staff also set specific objectives for 1975, and the missions and operational plans of each theater and phase.

With regard to the strategic opportunity, the General Staff foresaw that it could occur in three situations: 1. When we launched our strongest attacks, especially during the second phase of 1975; 2. During the rainy season in Nam Bo; 3. During the final months of the year, when the puppets were organizing their presidential election.

The process of guiding activities in each phase was a process of monitoring the puppets' ability to resist and the U.S. response, so that we could promptly grasp the strategic opportunity and win the greatest possible victory.

After listening to the report of the General Staff, the Political Bureau very profoundly and comprehensively analyzed the possibility of U.S. intervention, the strengths and weaknesses of the puppets, the results of strategic preparations, our new status and strength, etc., on the basis of which to make strategic decisions. The conference concluded that the United States had been defeated in its war of aggression and had to withdraw its troops, which was a major military defeat and a basic defeat of the Nixon Doctrine.

The U.S. administration was beset with many political, military, economic, and financial difficulties, both at home and abroad. They did not suspect that the Watergate affair would lead to the fall of Nixon and his replacement by Ford, who became president without having to stand for election. The economic and financial difficulties of the United States were also very great. Inflation had risen to 12 percent. The lives of the working people were still threatened, which caused them to struggle against the administration resuming its involvement in Vietnam. On the international scene, the United States had fallen behind the Soviet Union with regard to many types of strategic weapons. The contradictions between the United States and its allies were becoming increasingly sharp. The anti-U.S. movement was continuing to develop in many places in the world. The United States was imperiled by a new general crisis.

Truong Chinh was of the opinion that with regard to Vietnam the United States was faced with two choices: either replace Thieu with someone else and rely on the Agreement to limit our victory, or continue to intervene to a certain extent to save the situation. We needed to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the United States encountering many difficulties to win a decisive, certain victory.

Pham Van Dong presented proof that the United States had accepted defeat. In 1973, when meeting with Kissinger, he said, "The Vietnamese people thrice defeated Yuan armies. After defeating them we gave them food and horses so that they could return home. As for you, how many times can you fight us?"

Kissinger held up one finger. Pham Van Dong said, "I don't believe you!"

After concluding his story about his meeting with Kissinger he continued, "I only said that. The United States is very much in disarray. It doesn't dare become involved in Vietnam again. Even if offered candy the U.S. troops wouldn't dare return to South Vietnam. It would be difficult for them to intervene with ground forces, and if they intervene with their air force--as a fire brigade--that cannot be the decisive factor on the battlefield.

After the discussions, the conference agreed unanimously that the United States, having been defeated in its war of aggression in Vietnam, had been weakened but the U.S. imperialists had abandoned their intentions toward the Southeast Asian region and still had potential. We still had to be on guard against someone who was "weak but insane" (as analyzed by Nguyen Duy Trinh). The United States was no longer capable of intervening directly with ground forces, but we still had to have a plan to guard against the eventuality of their intervening with their air force and navy. The conference affirmed that

no matter to what degree it intervened, the United States could not reverse the situation and could not save its lackeys from collapse.

As for the Nguyen Van Thieu clique, the conference concluded that they still had the strengths of large military forces and much equipment, and were still capable of holding down the people, conscripting troops, and defending the municipalities and cities. But they also had very basic weaknesses: they were isolated politically, the army's morale had declined, and they were entirely dependent on the United States both economically and militarily. If U.S. aid were to be reduced the fighting capability and morale of the puppet troops would decline.

Never before had we been so strong and the enemy so weak, and the inevitable development tendency was for us to become increasingly strong and the enemy to become increasingly weak.

In 1973 and 1974 our soldiers and people in all theaters operated regularly and suffered few losses. We achieved good results in our strategic preparations in all regards, at the front, in the rear area, and on the strategic route. We had created an advantageous battlefield status, had built up powerful strategic reserve forces, and created the necessary material factors to win a decisive victory within a few years.

After analyzing all aspects of the situation, the conference unanimously approved the basic 2-year strategic plan and the 1975 strategic operations plan, as well as the troop recruitment norm recommended by the General Staff. We understood that the Political Bureau had made an initial decision so that the Central Military Commission and the sectors and echelons, especially the organs of the Ministry of National Defense could promptly carry it out. The Political Bureau decided to convene be attended by the theater commanders and would discuss matters further and make official decisions.

Then the conference further analyzed a number of points requiring attention in guiding the implementation of the above-mentioned strategic plans.

Both 1975 and 1976 would occupy very important positions, but 1975 would be the pivotal year and would create conditions for winning final victory in 1976. We would begin 1975 by an attack in the southern Central Highlands, combined with an offensive in the lowlands, to connect the Central Highlands with eastern Nam Bo. It was necessary to do a good job of carrying out the 1975 strategic plan in order to prepare for 1976, while paying attention to continuing the task of making strategic preparations (building forces, completing the network of strategic and campaign roads, reinforcing the battlefields, etc.).

We had to be active, take the initiative, be flexible, create the element of surprise, and decide upon strategic surprises that could lead to rapid developmental steps.

It was necessary to make greater efforts and take more effective steps to overcome the weaknesses of the urban political bases not being strong, the on-the-spot armed forces not yet being developed, the large-scale annihilation

battle methods of the main-force troops not yet being truly efficient, coordination among the battlefields not yet being truly good, the three offensive spearheads not yet being closely coordinated in many places, etc.

As regard the United States, we had to cleverly combine a strong military position with diplomacy to limit the possibility of U.S. intervention, while having a plan to counter the eventuality of their intervening by use of their air force and navy, especially when the lackeys were facing the peril of collapse.

We had to have a policy to take advantage of opportunities, especially when Thieu fell. We had to be prepared in all ways to exploit such opportunities to the maximum. No matter what the circumstances, we could not pass up strategic opportunities.

With regard to the strategic direction, the main-force troops had to prepare for both directions: the Central Highlands--the focal point of which was the southern Central Highlands--a very important strategic area, and eastern Nam Bo, ultimately the decisive area. It was necessary to ensure secrecy and surprise when sending forces down into the Mekong Delta, as well as in preparing for and carrying out a strategic attack in the southern Central Highlands.

In order to fight large-scale annihilating battles and disintegrate large enemy forces, the main-force troops had to improve their organization, ensure that their units were at full strength, ensure that the ranks of cadres were at full strength and that the cadres had good moral quality, and were capable of organizing and commanding combined arms combat. In using forces, it was necessary to know how to combine mobile forces with local forces and to have reserve forces.

With regard to the strategic and campaign fighting methods, it was necessary to combine the three strong blows (main-force, rural, and urban, to combine the three offensive spearheads, and to fight the enemy in all three strategic areas. It was necessary to organize war-deciding battles by main-force units and to fight large-scale annihilating battles in the jungles-and-mountains theater, combined operations, and battles to take subsectors and district seats and expand our liberated areas in the Mekong Delta and in Military Region 5. We had to carry out strategic interdictions, cut line of communications, carry out military proselytizing, and foment military uprisings and defections.

Attention would have to be paid to political-morale mobilization and to enabling the party, the armed forces, and the people to fully understand the strategic decisions and clearly understand the significance of the strategic opportunity, focus all thoughts and acts on winning victory in the final test of strength, and on that basis mobilize, organize, and bring into play the combined strength of the entire population and the entire army to overwhelm the enemy both militarily and politically, bolster the troops' fighting spirit, and continually press forward until final victory was won.

On the morning of 8 October, Ba concluded the first phase of the Political Bureau conference.

He directed the General Staff to take notes about the concluding report so that they could be sent to some people in the theaters for study before the Political Bureau resumed its conference.

In beginning the report, Ba said, "Our Political Bureau has agreed unanimously to complete the people's democratic national revolution in the South. That is an extremely important event and a very brave--indeed bold--decision. That decision resulted from the collective intelligence of the Political Bureau and from thoughts that had been under consideration for a long time, and from carefully weighing the pros and cons. It was based on experience that had been concluded over a period of several decades of combat, on the revolutionary actualities on the battlefield, and on the comparison of forces in our country and in the world."

After analyzing why the United States intervened in the South in 1954 and ultimately--in 1973--had to withdraw troops, he said, "The United States intervened because it thought it was strong and we were weak, and that it would win and we would lose. Now the United States has had to withdraw because we are strong and we are weak, we have won and have taken a very long step forward while it has been defeated and has taken a very grave step backward."

With regard to our strategic intention when we signed the Paris Agreement, Ba said that "Although we say that the United States had to withdraw because it was defeated and was weak, we know that it still has great potential and many insidious plots. We are never subjective and believe that they are powerless. Although we are winning one victory after another, we are still encountering many difficulties. At this time the aid provided by our camp is not as ample and timely as we would like. The reconciliation and collusion of the United States and China have caused additional complications for our resistance war. Under those circumstances we had to create a solid tendency of upward advance and a strong position. That is why we signed the Paris Agreement. For our part, the important thing about the Agreement was not that it recognized two administrations, two armies, and two areas of control, and called for the formation of a tripartite government, but essentially that the U.S. troops had to withdraw while our troops remained, the north-south corridor remained intact, and the rear area was joined with the front to form an integrated and unified area. Our intention was to maintain unchanged our status and strength in the South so that we could continue to attack the enemy." He then spoke of our struggle method: by means of the Paris Agreement, struggling against the enemy, rallying the mass forces, dividing the lackeys, and isolating the enemy. No matter which way the situation developed, we were determined to advance to winning complete victory.

With regard to the strategic opportunity to completely liberate the South, Ba said that "We have an opportunity now. Only after 10 years of fighting could we create that opportunity, so we must grasp it to lead the enterprise of national liberation to complete victory."

[18 Apr 86]

[Text] He analyzed the plots of the U.S. imperialists toward our country and Southeast Asia, after North Vietnam was liberated. At that time the United States wanted to monopolize Southeast Asia, but was defeated. The United States switched over to compromising to share benefits and areas of influence with a number of other powers which also plotted to achieve hegemony in that region. They regarded a Vietnam that was unified and independent, and was allied with two independent and unified countries—Laos and Cambodia—would be a major obstacle to their expansionist plot. Therefore, they sought ways to impede the progress of Vietnam and prolong our country's separation. The United States hoped to use China to exert pressure and force us to come to a halt after signing the Paris Agreement. Their plot was very dangerous, but at that time no one was prepared or able to carry it out.

In view of the above, we affirmed that that was the most favorable opportunity for our people to complete the liberation of the South and win complete victory for the national democratic revolution, while also helping the Laotian and Cambodian revolutions complete their national liberation undertakings. Except for that opportunity, there was no other. If we delayed for 10 or 15 more years the puppets could revive, the aggressor powers could recover, and the expansionists could become stronger, so the situation would become extremely complicated.

When making that strategic decision, the key matter was determining whether or not the United States would return to the South. In choosing that strategic opportunity, we decided that the United States was incapable of returning. But we also affirmed that even if the United States intervened to a limited degree they could not reverse the situation and we would still win.

The problem that was posed was that we had to decide upon the best way to fight and win victory. That opportunity demanded that we work quickly, efficiently, and definitively, but that we be clever. Only thereby could we achieve surprise, so that the enemy could not react in time. Could we do so? We agreed unanimously that we had to act and were determined to act.

After analyzing dialectically the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy since the Paris Agreement, Ba said that "it must be emphasized that it is necessary to clearly understand the great capabilities and forces we require and can mobilize, to create combined strength with which to win victory in the final test of strength with the enemy.

"Our strength is above all the strength of mastery by the people and the strength of the entire nation fighting the enemy, from North to South and in the rear area and at the front.

"Our strength is the strength of the two banners of national independence and socialism, which are tied in closely with the three revolutionary currents of the epoch.

"Our strength is the strength of people's war."

All conference participants listened attentively and were enthusiastically in agreement. Ba very happily began the concluding part of the report. He affirmed the following:

"Our determination is to mobilize the greatest possible efforts on the part of the entire party, army, and population in both regions, launch a final general offensive and uprising, develop revolutionary war to the highest level, annihilate and disintegrate the entire puppet army, occupy Saigon, the enemy's central lair, and all other cities, overthrow the puppet administration at the central level and at all other levels win political power for the people completely liberate the South, complete the people's national democratic revolution throughout the nation, and advance to unifying the nation." From then on, it was necessary to carry out all preparatory tasks very urgently and create the most ample conditions and material bases to attack strongly and rapidly and win a complete victory during the 1975-1976 2-year period.

"We are undertaking the greatest and most difficult historical mission ever. But never before have we been so enthusiastic and happy as at present. Our entire party, army, and population, and our entire nation, both the North and the South, must be determined to fulfill their missions. The people all over the nation and our friends all over the world are awaiting our victory. This opportunity does not allow us to be half-hearted or hesitant."

After the enthusiastic hand clapping in response to the conclusions of the General Secretary, the Secretary of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee said:

"Ba has concluded the conference, an historic conference which made many historic decisions to complete the liberation revolution in the South. Ba, on behalf of the party, has assigned a mission to the army. The army will fulfill, by all means, the historic mission entrusted it by the party."

The conference concluded with enthusiasm and confidence in the great victory that was to come.

We urgently carried out all tasks necessary to implement the Political Bureau resolution. A large number of urgent tasks were posed for the staff organ: supplementing the 1975 strategic plan and the plan to recruit troops and increase our troop strength, combat training, the recalculation of material needs, specialized research on the enemy with regard to the contingency of Thieu collapsing, in which case we would have to take advantage of the strategic opportunity in a timely manner, etc.

In the process of supplementing plans, a matter we continued to discuss was how to fully implement the decision of the Political Bureau, draft and implement basic plans and prepare contingency plans, be prepared to act in a positive and flexible manner, and not miss strategic opportunities, especially in the event of a sudden political upheaval in the south.

On 28 October the 2-year plan was approved by the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee.

The plenary conference of the Political Bureau was not held until December. While awaiting the conference, in accordance with the Military Commission, the General Staff communicated to the battlefields the decisions and plans that had received initial approval and provided guidance on making preparations in accordance with those plans.

For our part, we had to urgently begin and complete a large number of preparatory tasks necessary for the 1975 strategic plan.

Beginning in October, after the Political Bureau conference, the work atmosphere in the General Staff became strangely animated.

Many staff emissaries were sent to the localities and units. They were sent to Nghe An to assign a mission to the 116th Division, to carry out a troop reinforcement plan so that 1st Corps could be prepared to move south after completing training maneuvers at Sam Son, to the armed forces branches and combat arms to oversee the preparation of the technical units that had been the preparation of the technical units that had been assigned the mission of being prepared to move south to the Central Highlands theater when so ordered, etc.

With regard to the theaters, a whole series of tasks had to be carried out urgently: the supplementation of forces, the strengthening of the organization of 4th Corps and technical combat arms reinforcements for the B2 theater, the rectification of forces of the Tri Thien Military Region and 2nd Corps, the building of additional roads southwest of Hue, preparing artillery bases in order to interdict important enemy airfields and ports, reinforcing the main-force and local troops of Military Region 5 with troops and technical military equipment, supplementing the equipment of the 968th Division, which had just returned from lower Laos, etc. The General Staff and the general departments coordinated in carrying out those tasks very urgently.

A requirement that was posed was to, under any circumstances, reinforce the South with sufficient forces to win victory. The results of the two troop recruitment cycles in 1974 were very favorable conditions for fulfilling the requirements of the battlefield at the beginning of the dry season. Many families sent their fifth or sixth son off to the army. Some parents allowed both a son and a daughter to set out for the battlefields. Youths had peace of mind when they set out because villages and cooperatives helped and watched out for their families.

We and our comrades at the Rear Services General Department needed to review the battlefield preparations. The Truong Son troops were going all-out to complete the strategic route prior to the dry season to ensure transportation to Loc Ninh during both seasons. Each battlefield was urgently developing the campaign roads to the designated objectives. The system of supply depots and rear services stations was being completed in the strategic corridor from Route 9 to La Bang Khe and the system of oil pipelines and storage tanks was being extended from lower Laos to Bu Gia Map.

Group 559 was urgently fulfilling its plan to transport hundreds of tons of cargo of all kinds, as required by the 1975-1976 2-year plan, and some of the reserve supplies for the next year.

The manpower and materiel that were mobilized for the front reflected the unity of the entire populations and the will of the North, the great rear area, which was determined to go all-out to, along with our kith-and-kin on the great front line in the South, attain the final goal of the enterprise of national liberation.

During the last months of 1974, something that caused us concern was how to ensure that the quality of training during the second cycle was as good as that of the first cycle. Objectively, the training conditions during the first cycle were more difficult. Thanks to the rectification of organization, the cadre situation was unstable and the training time was shorter, but the requirements of the battlefield were more urgent. The Military Training Department, under the guidance of comrade Vuong Thua Vu, Deputy Chief of Staff, went all-out, along with the military regions, corps, armed forces branches, and combat arms, to enable the reinforcement battalions to complete their training programs, so that the cadres could receive supplemental training in the principal tactical and technical contents, and in the organization of command, prior to receiving their missions. Since the anti-French resistance war, Vu had been a diligent, devoted, loyal cadre with much experience in combat command and troop training, especially experience in training units for large-scale combined arms combat. In November 1974 the General Staff sent emissaries to the military regions, corps, armed forces branches, and combat arms with directives to carry out supplementary training in time to fulfill the 1975 mission requirements, while also relaying the newly recapitulated experiences regarding combined campaigns in attacking municipalities and cities and in attacking and wiping out subsectors, district seats and in wiping out enemy battalion and regiments going to relieve sieges, and also to pass on the results of research on coordinated combat arms fighting to annihilate enemy divisions. With regard to the 316th Division, because it was preparing to move urgently to the battlefield the General Staff, along with the general departments, sent a delegation to assist in all ways so that the unit could get underway in time. Because there was insufficient time for doing so before the division set out, it was not briefed regarding experiences in attacking subsectors and district seats until it reached the Central Highlands theater.

The enthusiastic, urgent, and serious working spirit of all elements of the General Staff organs, and their strong sense of responsibility, contributed to enabling the units and theaters to begin the campaign season with forces that were more ample in all regards and with an increasingly higher operational level. Those accomplishments were quiet feats of arms of the cadres and men in the rear which, along with the glorious feats of arms of the cadres and men at the front, with determination to transform the correct, wise strategic policy of the party into actual victory on the battlefield.

The urgent, heavy work load caused everyone to feel that the 2 months passed by very quickly.

[21 Apr 86]

[Text] The second session of the Political Bureau, the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission, and the comrades leading and guiding the battlefields took place in mid-December, 12 days after the first phase of the 1975 offensive began in the Mekong Delta.

Phan Hung, Tran Van Tra, and Phan Van Dang of Nam Bo, and Vo Chi Cong and Chu Huy Man of Military Region 5, had been present in Hanoi since the beginning of the month.

As had been the case with regard to many other conferences in the past, several days prior to the official meeting the Political Bureau and the Military Commission met individually with the representatives of each battlefield and heard them report on the situation. This time they also reported on the operational decisions and plans in their areas.

Phan Hung and Tran Van Tra reported on the situation in the B2 theater between mid-1973 and the end of 1974. Especially noteworthy was the fact that we had fought well during the recent rainy season. They reported on the regional plans, including the plan for the Route 14-Dong Xoai area.

Vo Chi Cong and Chu Huy Man reported on the enemy's situation and our situation, and the results of the fighting during the past 2 years, outstanding among which were the expansion of our liberated areas and the sending of many forces to put pressure on the enemy in the delta, the building or restoration of 840 kilometers of roads, the receiving of supplies from the great rear area, the results of self-sufficiency production, and the results attained in annihilating the enemy.

Because preparations had been made since the first round of meetings, during the second round the especially important matters received additional thought and were debated enthusiastically. How should the transformation in the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy be analyzed in relation to the general situation and in each theater? What objectives should be attained in 1975? In what theater were the enemy most vulnerable and in which theater would our primary attack be launched? When would the strategic opportunity arise? What could we do to take advantage of the strategic opportunity in a timely manner?

During these meetings the Political Bureau and the Military Commission set aside much time to listen to opinions from the battlefields. In the process of debating, the members of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission spoke of many matters which had received additional thought since the October meeting. The problems that had arisen with regard to many different aspects were deeply analyzed by the collective intelligence of the participants so that unanimous agreement could be reached in the end.

Van Tien Dung stressed that the use of military forces and the application of fighting methods had to be manifested immediately in drafting and developing plans. Le Duc Tho analyzed the situation with regard to the United States, the opportunity, the balance of forces, the basis of which to make decisions

for the 2-year period, attacking pacification, annihilating the enemy main-force units, building up the localities, and the military proselytizing work. Pham Van Dong analyzed the strategic operational method in the coming phase, the use of a combined strategy, the preparation of material-technical bases, and the training of new recruits. Truong Chinh discussed the special characteristics of the situation, the missions of the two regions, and the strategic fighting method, and agreed to the selection of the Central Highlands and Buon Ma Thuot. Tran Quoc Hoan, Le Van Luong, and Nguyen Duy Trinh spoke on the strategic measures, the requirement of combining the military, political, and diplomatic aspects, etc.

Throughout the course of the conference, every day, and sometimes twice a day, the Operations Department reported on the newest developments on the battlefield, and the reactions of Washington, Saigon, and the puppet battlefield commanders. Practically every time there was a report on the fighting we were provided with very valuable living documentation which affirmed that our status and strength were on the rise and those of the enemy were on the decline. The Phuoc Long victory was exemplary of that.

The process that led to the Phuoc Long victory was a process of mutual exchanges between the General Staff and the comrades in the B2 theater. We reached a agreement on the Dong Xoai and Phuoc Long objectives, although at first Phuoc Long was not proposed. The exchanges did not arrive at a conclusion as to whether or not to attack, but which objective would be attacked first, which objective would be attacked second, and which forces would be used in the attacks.

Until the final days of 1974 perhaps our greatest worry was still the matter of ammunition, including tank shells and heavy field artillery shells.

In a message sent to the General Staff in mid-August 1974, Tran Van Tra sounded an "alarm" about the shortage of heavy artillery shells in the B2 theater. He predicted that by the end of the year the main-force units and supply depots in the theater would have only about 4,800 120mm mortar shells; 1,190 160mm mortar shells; 6,500 122mm rockets; 300 105mm rockets; 7,800 130mm artillery shells, etc. At the end of the message Tra wrote, "As we begin 1975 we will experience difficulties with regard to the above types of shells. I recommend that the General Staff make all-out efforts to accelerate the sending of some heavy shells to the B2 theater by the beginning of the season.

In comparison to the B2 theater, the B1 theater (18) was experiencing an even greater shortage. In the first part of September, in a message to the General Staff, Phat, the deputy chief of staff of Military Region 5, estimated that by the end of 1974 the B1 theater would have only 1,100 120mm mortar shells, 80 160mm mortar shells, 1,000 85mm artillery shells, 4,500 130mm artillery shells, and 469 122mm rockets.

In the other theaters the situation was similar. At Thuong Duc, when we attacked and took the district seat a message was sent from the battlefield which informed us that "After more than a month of activity our forces have

declined. We are short of ammunition and mechanized artillery shells and DFL rounds are sufficient for only one low-level offensive."

Against that background, the B2 theater comrades favored attacking Dong Xoai first, while we at the General Staff favored attacking Bu Dang-Bu Na (farther north on Route 14) first. The reason was simple: Bu Dang-Bu Na should be attacked first because they were small objectives (sub-sectors) and victory was certain. There was also the possibility that we would capture artillery shells which we could use to attack Dong Xoai. Because the Bu Dang, Vinh Thieu, and Bu Na victories we captured four 105mm artillery pieces and 7,000 shells. We continued to develop the Dong Xoai attack, and as the 27 December 1974 message from Le Duc Anh, deputy theater commander, stated that on 26 December our troops had wiped out the complex of strong points at Dong Xoai without using tanks, although we had a tank company in reserve.

Having captured artillery shells at Bu Na, Bu Dang, and Dong Xoai, the General Staff agreed to develop the attack by attacking Phuoc Long, and in a separate meeting Ba and the members of the Military Commission agreed to allow the B2 theater comrades to use a 130mm artillery company in the Phuoc Long battle.

On that day, 6 January 1975, after 26 days of continuous fighting, news of the victory of the eastern Nam Bo troops in the Route 14-Phuoc Long campaign flew into the conference room of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission and signalled a spring season with many good prospects.

How would the enemy react? It was learned that 3 days previously Thieu had convened a special meeting of his cabinet to evaluate the situation. He ordered the awarding of 3.2 million dong to the troops who had defended Phuoc Long to the death. When the fate of the more than 6,000 troops at that important position had been decided, the Saigon press tried to make a big deal out of the news that the aircraft carrier Intrepid, the cruiser Long Beach, and many U.S. destroyers and oilers had left the Subic Bay base in the Philippines and were headed for the coast of Vietnam, and news that the U.S. 3rd Marine Division in Japan had been put on alert. But then the Saigon administration was disappointed when a White House spokesman said that "President Ford has no intention of violating the (Congressional) prohibitions regarding the use of American military forces in Vietnam." Thieu's exhortation to "retake Phuoc Long" was soon replaced by an appeal to "set aside 3 days of mourning and prayer for Phuoc Long."

In the Mekong Delta, the situation had undergone important transformations. The rural areas that had been liberated to one degree or another were steadily expanded, the corridor was connected, the offensive staging area was consolidated, our local potential was developed, and the enemy's were becoming increasingly limited.

On the afternoon of 6 January, after the conference's rest period, we and the heads of the operations and intelligence departments and the Central Team exchanged opinions on the developments during the first phase of the 1974-1975 dry season, and especially the Phuoc Long victory. We quickly reached agreement on the following points:

1. The situation on the battlefield was changing advantageously and was developing more rapidly than expected, especially in Military Region 5 and eastern Nam Bo.

2. The Phuoc Long battle was a new event signified a new step forward in maturization with regard to our combat operational level and affirmed the decline of the puppet army and the ability of the United States to react, which was already very limited.

3. The secrecy of our strategic stand and strategic operational plan was still ensured. Because of the sense of responsibility of the communications and cryptoanalysis troops, the enemy guessed wrong and evaluated us incorrectly, with regard to the strategic objectives, the main line of attack, the time when the offensive would be launched, the operational scale, the level of our main-force troops, etc.

4. The Phuoc Long battle was a new factor which allowed us to look far ahead with regard to prospects for implementing the strategic operational plan. In the second phase, we would be capable of liberating larger areas. Therefore, a problem that was posed for the General Staff was to study, and recommend the supplementation and adjustment of, the objectives of the next steps of the strategic operations plan, so that it could be appropriate to the new situation and to the guiding thought of the Political Bureau: to win greater and more rapid victories.

5. The shortage of large-caliber shells, which had always been a direct concern of the staff and rear services organs, had begun to be resolved. The artillery shell ammunition depot we captured at Phuoc Long was initial capital we could use to obtain returns many times greater. We would capture the Mai Hac De supply depot at Buon Ma Thuot, the military base complex at Da Nang, the Long Binh central supply depot, etc. The greater the victories we won and the more artillery shells we had, the more relieved the staff and rear services personnel became. Once again the slogan of "capturing from the enemy to fight the enemy and arming as we fought," which had been set forth by the party, had once again been transformed into reality on the battlefield by our soldiers and people. The brave, resourceful troops at the front had overcome a major difficulty which the strategic organs in the rear could not resolve.

We synthesized those observations and the next day presented them at the Political Bureau conference.

In the course of 20 days of very urgent, seething, and enthusiastic work all matters that were discussed were illuminated with a high degree of unanimity.

On 7 January 1975, Ba concluded the second phase of the Political Bureau conference. I noted that he was happier than usual. In beginning the concluding report, he said:

"In the previous conference, the Political Bureau agreed unanimously on the strategic direction to lead the anti-U.S. resistance war to complete victory. In this conference the Political Bureau further discussed matters with our

comrades in the South. The comrades in charge of the Military Region 5 and Nam Bo theaters are all present. We have evaluated the situation since the Paris Agreement, evaluated the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy, acknowledged the strategic opportunity, made the strategic decision to complete the people's national democratic revolution in the South in the 1975-1976 2-year period, and determined the missions, goals, and steps in carrying it out.

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[Text] "My concluding report at the previous conference dealt with those important matters. Today I will not touch on everything but will only recapitulate the matters about which you have expressed additional opinions, in order to confirm once again the determination of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee."

After mentioning the factors of victory and the new capabilities brought about by the Paris Agreement, Ba analyzed the strong new position we had created in many respects: initiative on the battlefield; an integrated strategic position that extended from north to south and had been consolidated and completed; the mobile main-force units had been built up and strengthened; strategic reserves had been concentrated in the important areas; the situation in the rural lowlands had been improved and staging areas had been created in areas near the large cities; especially, a large number of main-force units had been created in the Nam Bo lowlands, something we could not accomplish in the past; political struggle movement had been launched under the slogan of peace, independence, and national conciliation; and we were continuing to win the sympathy and support of the revolutionary force and progressive people of the world.

We still had a number of deficiencies: in building up the main-force and local troops we had not attained the requirements regarding numbers, quality, equipment, organization, and cadres, and their ability to engage in large-scale combined arms fighting over a long period of time. In the rural areas, we had not yet closely combined the three offensive spearheads, in many places the militia and guerrilla forces were still weak, and we had not yet created a basis on which the masses could struggle. In the cities, the political struggle had not yet become a truly deep and broad mass movement. In sum, during the past 2 years, because of deficiencies in guidance and command we were still limited in fully utilizing the factors of victory and the new capabilities.

As for the enemy, they also had certain strengths. For example, the puppet army still numbered nearly 700,000, with 13 regular divisions; the enemy still controlled all of the large cities and many highly populated and wealthy rural areas; they were still aided militarily by the United States; and they were still commanded by U.S. advisors. However, the enemy's status was becoming increasingly weak and their forces were on the decline. That situation was manifested in the following aspects: the enemy troops, both regular and local troops, were on the defensive; the local troops, such as the regional forces and popular forces, were less able to control the people; the puppet army's ability to coordinate had weakened because its forces and equipment had

declined; the puppet troops; morale had seriously declined; the area under enemy control had been divided and the "pacification" plan was becoming bankrupted; and the political and economic situation, especially in the cities, had never been so difficult and chaotic.

In view of that military, political, and economic situation, it would be difficult for Nguyen Van Thieu to remain in power.

After many years of difficult, arduous struggle, the Vietnamese revolution in general and the south in particular had brought about that important transformation in the comparison of forces. Never before had the military and political struggles had such favorable conditions or the ability to unite to form a high tide of offensive as at present. The situation was far different from that in the past. The United States had suffered one defeat after another and had to withdraw its troops. The puppet army and administration no longer had a source of support. Our army was at full strength and was present all over the South. The popular masses in the enemy areas were starting to arise and had a new spirit.

In 1974, while our status and strength grew rapidly, the enemy increasingly went down-hill militarily, politically, and economically. We attacked strongly and were certain to create new sudden transformation the enemy's downward slide.

On the basis of the evaluation made at both conferences, we could see with greater accuracy the historic opportunity and actual capability to win the final war-deciding victories and lead the anti-U.S. resistance war for national salvation to complete victory. We agreed on the necessity to prepare in all ways to victoriously conclude the national salvation war in 1975 or 1976.

Our mission for the coming period would be to grasp the historic opportunity and launch one combined campaign after another to win decisive battles and decisively conclude the anti-U.S. resistance war, complete the popular democratic national revolution in the South, and advance to unifying the fatherland. Once the popular democratic national revolution was completed, we could then advance the entire nation to socialism. While fulfilling that mission, we would work with Laos and Cambodia and help them advance.

In order to decisively carry out those decisions, it was necessary to carry out specific missions and fulfill the following requirements: carrying out large scale offensives and uprisings, wipe out subsectors and district seats, defeat the pacification plan, gain control of most of the rural areas in the Nam Bo lowlands, the Military Region 5 lowlands, and Tri Thien, launch combined arms campaigns by our main-force troops to break the puppets's backbone, combined with attacks against the puppet regular forces and rural pacification, threaten the large cities, especially Saigon, develop the political struggle movement to demand peace and national conciliation to a large scale, promote military proselytization, and destroy the rear services bases and war facilities of the enemy. We had to fully understand that the goal was to create combined strength, advance to a general offensive and

uprising, and defeat the enemy in their lairs, especially Saigon, in order to conclude the war.

The waging of that final battle would above all the responsibility of the military and political forces in the Nam Bo theater, including the forces of Saigon-Gia Dinh, and would also be the responsibility of the soldiers and people, including the regional main-force units and the main-force units which would arrive from the other theaters to play the decisive role.

Ba reviewed the 1975 activity plan and the missions of each theater, while also orienting all activities of all theaters toward the strategic war-deciding battle in the enemy's final lair by the most rapid route. After speaking of the specific missions of the Nam Bo, Military Region 5, Central Highlands, and Tri Thien theaters, Ba discussed the necessity of having preparatory plans in both the South and the North, to cope with the eventuality of the United States resuming attacks by its air force and navy, although there was little chance that that would happen, we had to be on guard, for the United States still plotted to maintain their neocolonialism.

He then spoke of the mission of the great rear area in the North: "Here in the North, the Party Central Committee and the government will go all-out to strengthen their force and ensure that the material-technical needs of the battlefields are fully met, and regard that as a basic condition for winning victory. Another urgent and important matters are preparing strategic reserve forces, recruiting 300,000 new recruits, accelerating the training of troops, and firmly grasping cadre training. We must do a good job of carrying out the political-ideological work among the troops and the people, and mobilize the entire army and population to manifest a spirit of 'all for the front, all for victory'. We must cleverly use the diplomatic struggle weapon."

As he began the final part of his summary report, Ba was very enthusiastic about the complete unanimity of the conference about all matters. He said that after the conference there were still many tasks that had to be carried out very urgently--at the front and in the rear area. He stated that "The General Staff must continue to complete the offensive plan that has been outlined, and further concretize the matters regarding the organization of implementation, force building, battlefield deployment, and providing rear services support. The General Staff is an organ with very important responsibility in carrying out this very historic decision of the Political Bureau."

Finally, he stressed that "That strategic war-deciding battle is a great undertaking. It will lead our people's anti-U.S. resistance war for national salvation to complete victory, contribute to changing the situation in Indochina and Southeast Asia, and begin a new developmental phase in the revolutionary movement of the world's people. Our party is determined to fulfill its glorious historic responsibility toward the nation and its noble international mission. In the immediate future we will still experience many difficulties and hardships, but if we bring into play the tradition of heroic combat and limitless creativity of our army and people, we are certain to overcome all. We are certain to win!"

Immediately after the conference concluded, one of the first matters the General Staff concentrated on resolving was the completion of the 1975 strategic operations plan, in which the most attention was paid to the direction of the coming strategic offensive. I remember that when concluding the conference Ba spoke of that matter rather clearly: "In the Military Region 5 and Central Highlands theaters, use three main-force divisions to attack the Central Highlands, open up a corridor connecting the southern Central Highlands with eastern Nam Bo, and create conditions for the main-force troops to move quickly into eastern Nam Bo and coordinate with the regional main-force troops in attacking Saigon. The opening battles will be fought to take Buon Ma Thuot, break through to Tuy Hoa and Phu Yen, cut the Military Region 5 lowlands in half, and create yet another direction from which to rapidly advance south and put pressure on Saigon."

When I heard Ba speak I remembered that in July of the previous year, when working with him at Do Son, we had talked about the Central Highlands area. A few months later, Tan (at that time a deputy chief of staff and head the high-level supplemental military training school) posed the following question to his students: if the Central Highlands area was selected as the primary area of strategic attack, what should the first objective be?

A few chose Kontum or Duc Lap, but most of the students recommended that Buon Ma Thuot be selected. No one recommended attacking the northern Central Highlands directly. They all chose the southern part, an attack against Buon Ma Thuot.

At a meeting of key General Staff cadres held to disseminate the strategic decisions and strategic plan that had been officially approved by the Political Bureau, as he listened to our deliberations at the end of the conference he recommended that the southern Central Highlands--more specifically Buon Ma Thuot--be selected. The members of the planning study element were very enthusiastic because the opinions of the leader coincided with their own recommendation. Thus from top to bottom it was Buon Ma Thuot.

In addition to guiding the adjustment of the 1975 operational plan, we and the members of the Intelligence Department discussed the enemy situation. What would be the capability of the puppets to react during the second phase in the key Central Highlands theater? What would be the U.S. reaction, and what were the chances that they would use their navy and air force to intervene to a limited degree, so that the puppet army could improve its ability to resist when we attacked on a large scale?

Comrade Phan Ham, deputy head of the Operations Department, and the comrades in charge of the Military Manpower Department, coordinated with the Rear Services General Department and did additional work with the cadres and sectors of the state organs, so that they could jointly recalculate capabilities, supplement the plan to prepare forces and technical equipment, and be prepared to make all-out efforts so that greater victories could be won on the battlefield during the second phase.

Something that made a profound impression on me during the time we were implementing the Political Bureau resolution was that the Military Commission

of the Party Central Committee paid much attention to political education, ideological leadership, and organization, especially in the main-force units. I still remember that during the meeting of 9 January 1975, in order to discuss the specific guidance of the second phase of the 1974-1975 dry-season campaign, and especially to guide the Central Highlands campaign, which would begin with the Buon Ma Thuot battle, the standing committee of the Military Commission stressed the following points about the political-ideological work:

1. Creating determination to overcome all difficulties, fight continuously, not fear sacrifices of hardships, and determination to compete to win the greatest victory, and oppose all manifestations of subjectivism, self-satisfaction, and wanting to hold back.
2. Firmly grasping the thought of waging annihilating battles, and attacking quickly and wiping out the enemy effectively, while also being concerned with stepping up military proselytization and disintegrating the enemy's ranks.

[23 Apr 85]

3. Manifesting a spirit of solidarity and cooperation among the units, combat arms, and areas, being prepared to accept the difficult missions, and creating favorable conditions so that their friends can fulfill the common missions.
4. Respecting battlefield discipline, and voluntarily and strictly implementing the policies toward the liberated area, POW's, and war booty.
5. Being concerned with training cadres even under actual combat conditions, and making ready the corps of cadres, especially the basic-level cadres, to ensure continuous combat guidance and command and supplement and develop new forces.

After the Political Bureau conference and the 9 January 1975 conference of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, all activities of the Ministry of National Defense were oriented toward the main battlefield--the Central Highlands--and Buon Ma Thuot.

The actual situation demonstrated that the extraordinary strength and limitless creativity of the masses on the great front line had accelerated the process of historical development beyond even the boldest estimates. After each experimental step on the battlefield, the strategic plan was continually supplemented and completed, especially during the test of wits of March 1975.

Chapter Five

The March Test of Wits

Ten years have past, but I still have vivid memories of the people and events of that memorable March. The bustling atmosphere in the strategic staff organ, the flood of messages from the battlefields full of news of victory, the enthusiastic briefings, etc. That is correct, all that is correct. But what made the deepest impression on me were the conferences of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission, meetings which delineated the path for our soldiers and people to advance from one victory to another in March and for our nation to win complete victory at the end of April.

A month after the Phuoc Long victory, on 5 February, Van Tien Dung set out for the Central Highlands. In accordance with the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission, he and Binh Duong Thien, head of the Rear Services General Department; Le Ngoc Hien, deputy chief of staff; and a number of cadres of the General Staff organs, the armed forces branches, and the combat arms were organized into a representative element--code-named Group A.75--of the High Command and the Military Commission. The group consisted not only of experienced command and staff cadres but also highly skilled communications and cryptographia cadres and personnel who had accumulated much work experience.

The General Staff monitored the group's journey and was informed that on 13 February it arrived at the Central Highlands front command. Le Ngoc Hien had gone in advance to study the battlefield situation and prepare an operational plan.

While Group A.75 was en route, in order to maintain secrecy we did not communicate with it via radio. But so that Dung and Group A.75 could receive the most recent information, which was necessary for the upcoming discussions about the operational plan, the General Staff communicated with the radio communications station of the B3 command and continually communicated the most recent information, especially regarding the enemy and rear services transportation in support of the campaign, so that B3 could relay the information to Group A.75 when it reached the Central Highlands.

With regard to the enemy's situation, by means of technical information, we paid special attention to the 18 February meeting between Thieu and the puppet generals in Saigon. Our attention was drawn to two conclusions reached by the puppet military leaders during that meeting:

First, they predicted that we would launch a spring-summer offensive in the near future, with the objectives of attacking pacification and gaining control land and population in the key theater, Military Region 2.

Second, Thieu admonished them to be on guard against our attacking Quang Duc,

Phienh, and Kontum, the "primary" objectives, while Buon Ma Thuot, if attacked, would only be a "secondary" objective.

On 22 February, after a meeting of the General Staff Organ was held to synthesize the enemy situation and our preparations in order to report to the standing committee of the Military Commission, we sent another message to Hanoi which included the newest information about the enemy that had been assembled and evaluated by the General Staff, covering the period from the beginning of the year to mid-February.

After bringing up the principal points about the over-all enemy troops strength and the two groups of enemy mobile strategic forces, in the southern part of Military Region 1 (Quang Nam-Da Nang) and the area around Saigon, the on-the-spot forces in each military zone, and the enemy's defeats in the "special simultaneous uprising" campaigns, especially in the key areas in Military Region 5, eastern Nam Bo, and the western part of the Mekong Delta, we spoke of the U.S. plot and the prediction of the puppet Joint General Staff about our strategic policy, especially information about the Central Highlands theater.

The U.S. government was urging the Congress to approve additional aid for the puppets. They sent additional U.S. military personnel to the South, including 340 Air Force personnel, secretly sent weapons and ammunition to the puppets, and increased the number of B52 bombers in Thailand. There was information that the United States had begun an airlift to take weapons directly to the Play Cu and Kontum airfields. At the Kontum airfield alone, every 3 days three or four C141 aircraft landed at night.

With regard to our strategic policy, the enemy thought we would launch an offensive larger than that of 1974 but not as large as that of 1975, and that we would take a number of additional subsectors and district posts and a number of towns and cities, but would try to avoid renewed U.S. intervention. We would attack in all four military regions, but the principal focus would be in Military Region 2, in order to liberate the cities of Play Cu and Kontum before the rainy season. The enemy had also discovered that we were making active preparations in the Quang Nam and Buon Ma Thuot. They predicted that we would send the 965th Division to Play Cu and the 107th Division to Cao Lanh. The enemy also expected that we would operate strongly in the southern Tri Thien area and in the area south-west of Da Nang. Noteworthy was the fact that the enemy were still trying to understand our strategic intentions and our deployment of strategic forces.

With regard to the time of the offensive, the enemy predicted that it would begin at Tet and last until the end of June 1975. Therefore, before Tet they sent additional theater mobile forces to the northern Central Highlands and the area southwest of Da Nang. Their strategic mobile forces remained in their former positions.

We also sent information about enemy preparations and air forces in Southeast Asia, about the coming maneuvers of SEATO naval forces, etc.

For our part, we provided a summary report on preparations in the Nam Bo,

Military Region 5, Central Highlands, and Tri Thien theaters, and information on the consolidation of forces and the results of troop recruitment, although before setting out Group A.75 had been informed about the initial results of that task.

Even in the first troop recruitment cycle there were favorable signs. During the last part of 1974 and the first part of 1975, when the strategic decisions of the Political Bureau and the results of the local military conference were disseminated to the military regions, the provinces in the North, and in all localities, from the lowlands region to the mountain region, there arose the most bustling troop recruitment movement ever. Many young men and women delayed their wedding dates, entrance to college, or study abroad so that they could enter the army during the year's first cycle. An atmosphere of "the entire nation enlisting" existed everywhere, in both urban and rural areas. It was a seething atmosphere of youths enthusiastically registering to enlist, including veterans who had completed their military service and went to the villages and districts to volunteer to return to active duty and the battlefield. The entire population had a high degree of unanimity toward the strategic decisions of the party. The hearts of the people in each village and neighborhood in the great rear area were night and day collected toward the great front line. They were of one will and were determined to, along with their compatriots in the South, attain the goals of the last phase of the enterprise of national liberation.

Based on the data reported by the localities, the staff organ calculated that by the end of April the number of recruits needed for 1975 would have been recruited, and that during the last part of 1975 and the first part of 1976 to 1978 troops would have been recruited, so that there would be time to train them.

With regard to providing rear services support for the Central Highlands theater, after he arrived there Dung stated in a message that all requirements of the campaign had been fulfilled, that Group 559 had served the campaign very actively, and that our troops were well-fed, our forces were large, we had ample weapons, our morale was high, etc. Never before had our troops been as strong or as highly concentrated as in the Central Highlands in 1975.

After that information was received, the staff and rear services cadres assigned the mission of preparing forces for the Central Highlands were very enthusiastic. They saw the results of their contributions to the key theater of the first phase of the offensive, which would begin in the following month.

On 17 February the General Staff received a message from Dung. At the same time, a liaison officer from Group A.75 arrived in the North to report on the operational plan.

Before Group A.75 set out, we had participated in an exchange of opinions between Van and Dung about the fighting attitude to be employed in the Central Highlands campaign. There was agreement that it was necessary to boldly liberate Buon Ma Thuot first. If the enemy there were not on guard there we could win an unexpected victory, which we would rapidly exploit. Endeavoring to maintain a high degree of secrecy was emphasized, to ensure that the first

battle was a smashing victory. They also discussed the necessity to rapidly develop the victory in order to annihilate much enemy manpower, while also liberating important strategic areas.

It must be pointed out that in accordance with the basic strategic plan we intended to liberate the Central Highlands in 1975, i.e. in the first phase of the 2-year plan, accompanied with the elimination of a number of strongholds in eastern Nam Bo, expanding the liberated area in the Mekong Delta, developing the Central Highlands victory, and expanding the liberated areas in Military Region 5 and Tri Thien.

In fact, the deployment of our forces in the Central Highlands differed from the plan of the strategic organ. When Group A.75 arrived on the scene, most of our forces were deployed between Duc Lap and Cao Song, with goals of annihilating the enemy, capturing that segment of Route 19, and opening up the strategic transportation corridor to the BS theater.

At the front, after the discussions it was realized that because our force deployment was awkward and would be difficult to readjust (that would take time and it would be difficult to maintain secrecy), they decided to attack Duc Lap first, then the next day attack Buon Ma Thuot. Because we had established a firm position and isolated Buon Ma Thuot, the enemy could not react in time. Only in the afternoon of 2 March, when we attacked Duc Lap, were the enemy alerted, but they did not determine our primary objective in time, and because we were firmly entrenched along routes 19, 14, and 21 the enemy could not reinforce Buon Ma Thuot.

(24 Apr 86)

[Text] In the city of Hanoi, if one had paid attention as one passed by the gate to Lane 4, one would have noticed, beginning with the first of March and especially after the 9th, an extraordinarily bustling atmosphere in the operations and intelligence departments, and in the communications, cryptanalysis, and other organs.

After our troops launched their attack on Duc Lap, the technical reconnaissance element of the Intelligence Department concentrated on closely monitoring all enemy movements. Office 73 of the Intelligence Department collected, selected, and analyzed secret information and open information from the VNA, the BBC, etc. The cadres of the operations and intelligence department were on duty 24 hours a day.

The briefing in the "Dragon House" area on the morning of the 10th took place in an enthusiastic atmosphere. We had received the first news that Duc Lap, Cao Song, and Nui Lam (Military Region 5) had been taken and that the eastern Truong Son strategic route had been opened up. To the north, we had taken the Thanh An district seat. On Route 19, we had moved to the area west of Phay Lu City.

It was edifying that during the morning briefing that everyone listened attentively to news about the enemy's reaction. The same was true this time. We learned that at a meeting at HUB on the previous day, 9 March, the puppet

commanding generals in the Central Highlands still expressed belief that our attack on Quang Don and threatening of Buon Ma Thuot were feints. Perhaps within the next few days we would concentrate and launch a strong attack against Play Cu and Cong Tum. Therefore, the principal task at present was to strengthen all capabilities to defend the northern part of the Central Highlands.

Thus the leaders of the puppet army continued to assess the situation incorrectly and therefore continued to react incorrectly. They even reduced their forces in the southern Central Highlands so that they could be sent to reinforce Play Cu, which caused Buon Ma Thuot become even more vulnerable and isolated. During the initial test of will during the dry season in the Central Highlands theater, our correctness and victories, and the enemy's mistakes and defeats, became evident every day and every hour.

Several days previously, there were occasionally signs of worry in the staff organ. We learned that a few of our troops had been wounded and then captured, and that the enemy had picked up a number of items of individual equipment our troops had dropped on Route 14 as they were moving in the area south of Buon Ma Thuot. But by that day, thanks to the reports about the enemy's activities, we were no longer worried. Our activities to mislead the enemy had proved to be effective.

One thing that attracted our attention was that the enemy troops' morale had rapidly deteriorated, as manifested in their rapid collapse during the test of strength on 10 March. They could not resist our attacks on their subsectors and district seats. Therefore, we concluded that we had to boldly develop our offensive.

After listening to a report on the situation in the Central Highlands theater, Pan carefully questioned us about the coordinating battlefields, especially the Mekong Delta. There was some evidence that the enemy were still making all-out efforts to strengthen the regional forces and popular forces, but because their troop recruitment capabilities were increasingly limited, the enemy forces at the basic level were declining. That situation attracted the attention of the members of the Military Commission. For our part, because we made meticulous preparations and closely coordinated the three offensive prongs, during the recent phase the activities of our forces in the Mekong Delta had achieved great results: many outposts were taken, many villages were liberated, thousands of families of puppet soldiers participated in the military proselytizing work, and when puppet troops deserted they were hidden by the people and taken back to their homes, there were thousands of face-to-face struggles against the enemy, and the people and guerrillas cut segments of Route 4.

The Intelligence Department and the operational duty team were directed to closely monitor developments in the Central Highlands and the coordinating battlefields. The Buon Ma Thuot battle began on the morning of 10 March. While we were listening to the daily briefing we received the first news that the battle was developing favorably. Each "hairbread" of the battlefield was monitored by the operational duty team, and each advance of our troops was marked on the map. The fighting in the Central Highlands, the center of which

was Ban Ma Thout, was the number-one concern of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, and the people with responsible positions in the General Staff and the general departments.

In the morning of 11 March, the members of the Political Bureau came to Zone A within the citadel to obtain first-hand information of the Ban Ma Thout battle and to hold the first important meeting with the Military Commission since the beginning of the Central Highlands campaign, which was developing favorably.

After listening to a General Staff report on developments during the first 10 days of the Central Highlands campaign and on the coordinating battlefields, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission exchanged opinions about the direction of development of the Central Highlands battlefield, a subject which had been discussed in the past.

They quickly reached agreement that the enemy's morale had deteriorated, their combat capabilities were limited, and they were isolated defensively while we were still at full strength, had near services support, and had favorable weather. We had to rapidly consolidate the newly liberated areas, be prepared to fight enemy counterattacks, continue to expand our attack around the city after mastering Ban Ma Thout and completely mastering Cao Lanh Province, while at the same time developing in the direction of Cao Xuy, but not yet hastily developing it to the south.

The victories during the first 10 days of March pleased them very much and nearly everyone focused their thoughts and abilities on winning greater victories than originally anticipated.

Truong Chinh, Le Duc Tho, and Le Thanh Gien realized that it was necessary to begin thinking about Hue and Da Nang. They realized that it was necessary to remind Tri Thien to step up its effort: "When we move down into the lowlands the enemy will only run away."

Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap brought up the new factors that were appearing. The situation on the battlefield was changing rapidly and it was necessary to quickly grasp the opportunity.

Finally, Ba made his concluding remarks. In general, he said: "Last year we also fought during the rainy season. We must consider whether or not that is a new way of working. We fought during the dry season and also fought during the rainy season. Something else that was new was that the Ban Ma Thout victory was quick and efficient. That victory demonstrated that the objective situation demanded more rapid preparations in all regards. In the past, we drafted a strategy to liberate the South within 2 years. A short time ago it was Fyroc Long, now there is Ban Ma Thout. Can we accelerate things even more? Was Ban Ma Thout the beginning of a general strategic offensive? We must think about that. We now have two corps in the South. In the North, we have one corps. They must be used in a flexible and very concentrated manner, and should not be dispersed. There must be strong fields in that area the opportunity arises we can launch a strong attack against Saigon."

That afternoon, the operations officer gave me a message. When I saw the expression on his face I assumed that the news was good. From the Central Highlands battlefield, Dung had sent a message which informed us that we had completely mastered the city of Buon Ma Thuot and the area from Duc Lap to Sao Trang. The enemy had been taken by surprise and had been struck a mortal blow. We captured nearly 1,000 POW's and a large amount of war booty, including 12 artillery pieces and nearly 100 tons of artillery shells. Our troops were developing their attack and wiping out the objectives in the vicinity.

I thought to myself, "Perhaps the comrades in the South are sympathetic toward one of the greatest worries of the staff organ in the North and have promptly informed us of the amount of artillery ammunition captured. The battle is not yet over, so by the time the Central Highlands campaign is over the amount of artillery ammunition we capture is certain to be even greater. Even so, 100 tons is a welcome figure."

Dung's message also informed us of preliminary intentions with regard to developing the campaign after the Buon Ma Thuot campaign.

That afternoon, Van sent a message to Dung.

After expressing happiness and enthusiasm over our troops' great smashing victories in both the main and secondary areas, the message which stated:

"This morning, before receiving your message, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission met, assessed the situation, and reached the following principal conclusions:

"a. The strategic and campaign plans of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission are accurate and the preparatory work has been carried out relatively well, as even during the first days we have won major victories.

"b. The victories at Buon Ma Thuot and Duc Lap, along route 19, and in the other areas prove that we are capable of winning great victories at a more rapid rate than we had foreseen. A outstanding feature is that the enemy's morale has deteriorated.

"c. In view of that situation, even in this phase, and in the succeeding phases of our plan, we must have an urgent and bold spirit. We must grasp the new opportunity and win a great victory."

After expressing complete unanimity with the position taken in Dung's message, and reiterating the campaign's direction of development, the message stated:

"The Political Bureau and the Military Commission ardently congratulate all cadres and enlisted men, and all party members, Youth Union members, workers, civil servants, and members of the local armed forces who, manifesting a determined-to-win, heroic, resolute, creative, bold, and urgent spirit, have won great victories even during the first days of the campaign. We must grasp the favorable opportunity in a timely manner and win even greater victories.

"signed: 'Chien'" (19)

The Intelligence Department quickly grasped the enemy's reactions. At first they made incorrect predictions, and now they were resisting passively.

At noon on 12 March, the High Command informed Van Tien Dung, Hoang Minh Thao, and the standing committee of the party committee of the Central Highlands military region that according to the latest information the enemy intended to use the remaining forces and positions in the outskirts of Buon Ma Thuot to, along with reinforcements that would be sent, counterattack in hopes of retaking Buon Ma Thuot. Information had been received that the 45th Regiment and the headquarters unit of the puppet 23rd Division had been sent to Buon Ma Thuot by helicopter at noon on 11 March, and that the puppet air force was being mobilized to a high degree. It was necessary to rapidly concentrate additional forces, quickly annihilate the enemy units and bases around Buon Ma Thuot, and annihilate their reinforcements. Those matters would have a decisive significance with regard to the campaign's development. It was necessary to monitor the situation and guide all activities in the developmental directions that had been selected (Cheo Reo, Play Cu, and Route 19).

At the same time, the General Staff informed Military Region 5, the B2 theater, Tri Thien, and 2nd Corps of the observations of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission during the meeting held on the morning of 11 March, regarding the great victories won in our new offensive on all battlefields since 4 March, of the enemy's intentions after their defeat at Buon Ma Thuot, and on the direction of future activities on the battlefields. The message stated"

"During the present phase, and during our succeeding plan, we must be urgent and bold and take advantage of the favorable new conditions to win an even greater victory. We must pay all-out attention to annihilating truly large numbers of the enemy whether they are withdrawing or sending in reinforcements. At the same time, with the new momentum of victory, promptly develop the offensive in the pre-determined directions. On each battlefield we must, on the basis of the basic decisions that have been made, carry them out with a more resolute and bolder spirit."

[25 Apr 87]

[Text] During the briefing on the morning of 13 March, based on newly received information the High Command predicted that if a large part of the enemy manpower were annihilated, if Buon Ma Thuot and many district seats were lost, and if we carried out a strategic interdiction of Route 19, the enemy may concentrate their remaining Central Highland forces at Play Cu, and may be forced to carry out a strategic evacuation.

We communicated that observation to our comrades in the B3 theater and Military Region 5 and emphasized an opinion that had been agreed to unanimously by the Military Commission: it was necessary to surround PlayCu with all kinds of firepower, including anti-aircraft artillery, to cut the

enemy's supply routes, and to make good preparations to annihilate the enemy under both contingencies: the enemy forming an enclave at Play Cu or evacuating the Central Highlands.

On the morning of 15 March the Intelligence Department reported that the enemy's intended reaction was clear. Thieu had directly ordered Gen. Pham Van Phu to make all-out efforts to hold the positions around Buon Ma Thuot in order to have a staging area from which the 21st Ranger Group and the 44th and 45th regiments of the 23rd Division, with the support of the 3rd Air Force Division at the Thanh Son airfield in Phan Rang, could launch an attack to retake the city of Buon Ma Thuot. The 7th Ranger Group had been sent from Saigon to replace the 23rd Division at Play Cu.

When the enemy began to implement their plan, we surrounded and inflicted heavy casualties on the 21st Ranger Group. On 13 March the enemy had to use more than 200 helicopters and support aircraft to land the 45th Regiment east of Buon Ma Thuot. But because of our strong pressure it was unable to establish a position and had to withdraw to the Phuoc An area. On the following day, 14 March, we annihilated two battalions of that regiment.

In addition to that information, during a briefing on the 15th the Intelligence Department reported that information had been received that the enemy believed that the major focus of our strategic offensive was the Central Highlands, had a rather good idea of our strategic forces in that theater, and believed that our activities in the other areas would be limited. Therefore, the enemy had taken the course of sending strategic mobile forces (the airborne brigades) and a number of armored brigades to carry out a relatively large operation (perhaps along Route 21) in hopes of retaking Buon Ma Thuot.

After exchanging opinions with Ba and Tho, Van informed Dung of that situation and emphasized that in the immediate future we would have to concentrate ample forces in the Buon Ma Thuot and its environs, rectify and firmly control our reserve forces, and urgently make good use of time to wipe out the enemy units, especially in the Phuoc An area, while being prepared to annihilate enemy reinforcements arriving by air or land. The next step would be to shift forces to the north to wipe out the enemy at Cheo Reo. The Buon Ma Thuot battle was developing into a large-scale battle in which about two enemy divisions had been wiped out.

The message had just been handed over to the cryptanalysts, who were encoding it, when the duty officer requested that it be handed back. Van added a paragraph:

"After writing this message I received your message No. 5. I agree with your assessments. We will complete the campaign far in advance of the planned timetable. We are studying the situation and making urgent preparations in view of it. At the beginning of next week, after requesting instructions from the Political Bureau, we will send you another message."

In the above-mentioned message No. 05 (dated 14 March), Dung stated that our comrades in the B3 theater were very enthusiastic over the spirit and policy

of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission toward developing the campaign: "We will endeavor to organize, guide, and implement in order to fulfill that requirement, step up the pace, and surpass the 1975 plan."

Dung added that the situation was developing very rapidly and in a very complicated manner, so the "strange" (20) work style of our cadres could not keep up with it. That situation had to be rapidly overcome.

In the course of monitoring the enemy's situation for several days in mid-March, we noted a new phenomenon on Route 1. A few days after the Buon Ma Thuot victory, the Intelligence Department reported that the enemy had shifted troops from Tri Thien to Da Nang. They sent Ranger Group 14 to Quang Tri to replace the marine division, which was sent to Da Nang. We saw that in addition to the firepower of the on-the-spot units it was necessary to send additional units with strong firepower, deployed in solid positions, to interdict Route 1 south of Tri Thien, especially to interrupt their troop movements. Doan Tue, the artillery commander, who had been detailed to work with the central team of the General Staff at the beginning of March 1974, was directed to immediately organize a group of artillery cadres, headed by comrade Luu Huong, to undertake discussions with Hoang Dan, deputy commander of 2nd Corps, to prepare artillery fire support bases in western Tri Thien, to keep pressure on the enemy along Route 1, from Quang Tri to Thua Thien. After exchanging opinions and reaching agreement, Le Trong Tan directed the advance headquarters of the B4 (21) and B5 (22) fronts to attack strongly and annihilate much enemy manpower, strongly attack traffic on Route 1, and step up guerrilla warfare in the lowlands, and to regard those actions as very important missions for the immediate future.

In the Military Region 5 theater, on 15 March, in a message sent to the General Staff, Chu Huy Man also observed that the situation was developing rapidly and favorably. He recommended that after Buon Ma Thuot the campaign be directed northward, in the direction of Chao Reo and Play Cu (to take them or to cut them off from their supply lines). In the coastal area of Military Region 5 we would wipe out the enemy at Tam Ky, Tra Bong, and Son Ha, and then develop the attack down to Route 1, essentially liberate northern Quang Ngai, isolate the city, and attack strongly in the south, along the border with Binh Dinh, after which Quang Ngai City would be liberated. In Binh Dinh, our 3rd Division was concentrating its forces to wipe out the puppet 42nd Regiment, after which it would develop its attack into southern Binh Dinh to immobilize the enemy's 22nd Division and create conditions for expanding the liberated areas and winning control of the population in the lowlands. Meanwhile, an element would take the positions around and surround An Khe, thus creating a decisive opportunity.

On the 17th, when in the Central Highlands theater our troops had essentially defeated two enemy counterattacks to retake Buon Ma Thuot, the General Staff received a directive to summarize the situation and prepare for the coming meeting of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission. We learned that that meeting would be an important follow-up meeting to that held on 11 March to evaluate the over-all situation and determine the direction of development of the strategic offensive after the Buon Ma Thuot victory.

After learning of that important meeting, on the 16th Dung sent a message to the Political Bureau and the Military Commission which presented a "summary report of the situation and advocating that we continue to win victories during the present dry season."

After mentioning the incorrect U.S.-puppet assessments, with regard to both the thrust of our strategy and our capability to fight on a large scale, and evaluating the great victories won on the Central Highlands battlefield and the remaining limitations of our troops, which had to be overcome, especially with regard to consciousness of the enemy and ourselves under the new conditions, and with regard to combat organization and command which was outmoded, cumbersome work styles, etc., Dung recommended several major tasks that should be carried out during the dry season:

1. Defending and consolidating the newly liberated areas.
2. Wiping out reinforcements and taking the remaining districts in Dac Lac and Duc Xuyen District, and retaining control of Route 21 so that the enemy could not send reinforcements.
3. Developing the attack against Cheo Reo, tightly encircling the enemy at Play Cu, and cutting off Play Cu from Cong Tum.
4. Recommending that B2 coordinate by attacking in the direction of Quang Duc, attacking and taking Nhan Co, and surrounding and taking Gia Nghia; that Military Region 5 attack and take An Khe and completely interdict Route 19; and that the B4 and B5 fronts cut Hue off from Da Nang and threaten those cities.

The Operations Department quickly made copies of Dung's message and immediately sent them to the members of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission, for the message arrived after the briefing on the morning of the 17th had concluded. A new matter that had arisen and was discussed during the morning briefing was that the enemy were forming strategic enclaves earlier than we had expected. In view of the coming development of our offensive, the formation of strategic enclaves by the puppets would continue, with concentrations at Saigon, Cam Ranh, and perhaps Da Nang. That was a major opportunity which had appeared earlier than we expected. The problem that was posed was in which direction to develop the campaign. We foresaw two contingencies.

In the first contingency, after the Central Highlands had been liberated, or essentially liberated, the offensive would develop in two directions: in the main direction, most of the B3 forces would develop down into eastern Nam Bo; the second direction would be to develop down into the lowlands of Military Region 5 with the existing forces, possibly reinforced by the 968th Division and technical equipment.

According to the second contingency, most of the main-force units in the Central Highlands would develop in the direction of the Military Region 5 lowlands, and liberate Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Nha Trang, only then developing down into eastern Nam Bo.

After comparing those two alternatives Van and the leading cadres of the General Staff unanimously recommended that the Political Bureau act in accordance with the first.

Another important task which we felt must be urgently carried out after obtaining their approval: shifting the entire 559 route to Route 14 and increasing equipment in order to carry out the transportation work, defend the supply corridor, and consolidate the liberated area.(23)

Also on the 17th, in a message sent to the standing committees of the Military Region 4 party committee and the Tri Thien Military Region, the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission emphasized that the situation was developing rapidly a major opportunity had arisen earlier than expected, and the enemy, who were on the defensive in the southern Central Highlands, Military Region 5, and Nam Bo, and were beginning to form strategic enclaves. In view of that situation, Tri Thien had many new advantages to step up its activities in all regards. Specifically, it was necessary to step up attacks by main-force units from the west, carry out a strategic interdiction between Hue and Da Nang, boldly send forces down into the lowlands, step up guerrilla warfare, put pressure on the enemy's defense lines, and closely combine guerrilla warfare by the soldiers and people in the lowlands with attacks by main-force units from the west.

That night, when it became clear that the enemy were evacuating Play Cu and Cong Tum, we exchanged opinions and Tan immediately directed the Tri Thien Military Region and the Military Region 5 to move down into the lowlands, not on a battalion scale, but to prepare to send regiments to, along with the local troops and the guerrilla and militia forces, the work teams, and the people to kill tyrants, destroy the control apparatus, take areas behind enemy lines, capture the Phu Loc district seat, and cut Route 1, while urgently preparing firepower to attack Da Nang.

On the following day, 18 March, we learned that the airborne division in Da Nang was being withdrawn to Saigon and was being replaced by the Marine Division, and there were indications that the enemy may abandon the area between Hue and the Thach Han River. We concluded that the enemy were beginning to carry out a strategic enclave plan all over the South, which signified a very serious new deterioration in the U.S.-puppet situation. After the morning briefing, the General Staff sent messages to the B4 and B5 fronts, stressing the necessity to be bold and urgent and not allow the enemy to withdraw safely or evacuate the area north of Hue to form an enclave at Da Nang; they had to fight their way east of Route 1, cut that road, and shell the airfield and supply depot at Phu Bai.

On the same day, Van Tien Dung sent a message from the Central Highlands informing us that the enemy had withdrawn from Cong Tum and Play Cu on the morning of the 16th along Route 7 and the direction of Cheo Reo. Our troops were ordered to concentrate all capabilities to interdict Route 7 and wipe out the fleeing enemy, while continuing to develop their attack down into Khanh Duong and wipe out the enemy's 23rd Division.

The meeting of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission on 18 March took place against the background of the battlefield situation changing very rapidly. Beginning the meeting, Ba happily exclaimed, "The situation is developing so fast!" That thought was shared by everyone attending the meeting. Ba continued:

"The Central Highlands was an important yardstick for evaluating the enemy. The enemy were surprised in four ways:

"1. They were surprised because they could not sabotage the Agreement, but were resolutely counterattacked by us.

"2. They were surprised by the scale of our attacks. They believed that we would not attack on a large scale until 1976, not in 1975.

[28 Apr 86]

[Text] 3. They were surprised with regard to the direction of our offensive in the Central Highlands.

4. They were surprised because the Central Highlands collapsed so quickly.

Then he spoke of attacking the enemy in strategic enclaves and the direction of developing the attack on Saigon.

He expressed his view that if the enemy were able to form enclaves they would be strong. We had to find a way to weaken the enemy while they were forming the enclaves, while they were still dispersed in Military Region 5, the Mekong Delta, and eastern Nam Bo. The enemy were forming enclaves because they realized that if they dispersed their military force they would be weak. But we affirmed that the more they formed enclaves the more we would annihilate them. We had to form three fists--main-force, rural, and urban--all of which had to be strong. We had to foment military insurrections. We had to concentrate nine divisions in the direction of Saigon, with four or five divisions in reserve. We would thus create surprise and increase our strength three-fold on four-fold. Attacking Saigon would be difficult. We had to wipe out at least three enemy divisions. Our military forces had to annihilate truly large numbers of the enemy.

The General Staff made a combined report on the situation in the B2 theater and in the Mekong Delta. Recently little information had been received from the B2 theater. But in March the COSVN resolution on the B2 theater's mission of coordinating with the main battlefield and preparing for the Mekong Delta to coordinate with Saigon advocated the called for:

1. Cutting Route 4 between My Tho and Can Tho and cutting the Cho Gao canal.

2. Strongly attacking the forces of the enemy's 21st and 7th divisions to prevent them from reinforcing Saigon, while also preventing enemy forces in Saigon from forming an enclave in the delta.

3. Interdicting the Tra Noc airfield in Can Tho to prevent the enemy from

using it to support the main battlefield around Saigon.

4. Urgently preparing to promptly launch a mass uprising and taking full advantage of the opportunity afforded by our attack on Saigon to carry out simultaneous attacks and uprisings in accordance with the slogan of villages liberating villages, districts liberating districts, and provinces liberating provinces, primarily by the use of local forces. The key areas requiring concentrated guidance were My Tho, Can Tho, and Ben Tre.

In the course of discussions, the secretary of the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission recommended that the Political Bureau make a decision to liberate the South in 1975. The situation was evolving rapidly. Within a period of only 10 days, beginning with the attack on Duc Lap, the enemy had begun to form large enclaves. The comparison of forces had changed. The puppets had clearly become weaker. Although there were signs that the United States was preparing air forces, it was experiencing difficulties in many regards the situation was rapidly, and the puppet troops were weakening rapidly, so the United States would perhaps not dare intervene again. The enemy were forming enclaves earlier than we expected and their morale was deteriorating rapidly. We were at full strength, our forces were concentrated, and we had strong morale. He recommended that we deploy forces in three directions. The primary direction would be Saigon but the Mekong Delta would be a very important secondary direction. The other two directions would be Tri Thien-Da Nang and the lowlands of Military Region 5. The divisions on the Central Highlands front should be sent to Saigon. Those divisions should be reinforced with technical military equipment and anti-aircraft artillery taken from the enemy in order to strengthen and supplement them. The Tri Thien Military Region would cut Route 1 and isolate Hue from Da Nang. He recommended that 1st Corps set out for the South. The slogan would be "be bold, be urgent, and win certain victories." Those tasks should be carried out simultaneously or in succession, in a flexible manner, in order to meet all three requirements: surrounding, dividing, and annihilating the enemy. In April it would be necessary to surround and divide the enemy strategically and bring about an upheaval in the strategic situation. The Mekong Delta and Military Region 5 would strongly attack enemy troops carrying out pacification operations and step up the process of winning control of the population. Permission would be given to form a number of additional district and provincial battalions and to build and train them and prepare to supplement the main-force units.

Le Duc Tho evaluated in depth the possibility that the United States would reintervene. He affirmed that the collapse of the puppet army on the battlefield was very basic because it was no longer supported by U.S. troops. The question that was posed was whether the United States would return and would dare intervene. The difficulties confronting the United States were even greater than we thought. They were no longer capable of reintervening. Since U.S. troops directly intervened, i.e. during the past 10 years (1965-1975), we had never had such a good opportunity. We had predicted that the enemy would form enclaves, which they were now doing earlier than we had expected. They wanted to preserve their forces so that they could form enclaves in order to preserve their forces, but they had suffered heavy casualties. We had to attack immediately, while the enemy were still forming

enclaves, so that they would continue to weaken. Where would they form enclaves? How would we prevent them from doing so? They could form enclaves to hold the strategic roads and strategic bases along the coast and in the delta. We had to stop them on two fronts: attacking the enemy regular units and moving into the lowlands, and by surrounding, dividing, and annihilating them. As Van said, we had a basis on which to win a definitive victory in 1975. That depended on organization, rear services, and cadres.

Truong Chinh, Pham Van Dong, and the other comrades spoke of many other aspects in evaluating the enemy's all-round decline, their intention of forming strategic enclaves, and our strategic fighting methods in the various areas. Their opinions manifested the spirit of having to grasp the opportunity and being determined to win victories as rapidly as possible.

The discussion was truly seething and enthusiastic all morning long, even during the break periods.

Finally, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee unanimously decided to fulfill the 2-year plan immediately, in 1975. Clearly, one of the outstanding features of our party's war guidance, which does not end with grasping the opportunity and making correct strategic decisions: when a strategic opportunity arises more rapidly than expected, it quickly grasps the opportunity, provides sharp strategic guidance, and promptly win greater, more rapid victories.

After the conference, Van sent a message informing Dung of the assessment of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission regarding our great victory of strategic significance (which signified a new, very important development of the over-all situation and a new step toward the collapse of the U.S. and their puppets), and regarding the enemy's intention of forming large strategic enclaves, in order to concentrate forces in the Saigon area, in the Mekong Delta, and perhaps at Da Nang and Cam Ranh, with the plot of creating a relatively solid position in order to reach a political solution or continue to hold part of the South. Therefore, we needed to make good use of time, act urgently to surprise the enemy (with regard to time, direction and forces), be extremely bold, and ensure certain victories. In that spirit, the Political Bureau weighed all aspects and decided to carry out the first alternate plan.⁽²⁴⁾ After completing the liberation of the Central Highlands, we needed to rapidly rectify the main-force units, while urgently carrying out all preparatory tasks according to the first alternate plan. The following week, Le Trong Tam would go south to meet with Van Tien Dung and Vo Chi Cong and other comrades in the B2 theater would come north (a message had been sent requesting them to do so) to report to the Political Bureau on their intentions and contribute opinions on drafting a plan to implement them.

After the message was sent the General Staff received a message from Dung, also dated 19 March. The two messages were transmitted at the same time and had the same content; the direction in which the strategic offensive should be developed during the coming period.

Dung referred to the enemy defeats during and after the Central Highlands campaign, especially in the enemy's Military Region II, "the military region

which is in greatest disarray because it has suffered heavy losses, has the lowest morale, and has had to evacuate the Central Highlands." After analyzing our conditions which would allow us to continue to develop our victories, and analyzing the strategic requirements which had to be fulfilled in the coming period, Dung expressed his intentions, which included sending the Central Highlands forces to, along with the Military Region 5 forces, develop the offensive down into Binh Dinh and Phu Yen and part of Khanh Hoa, annihilate enemy manpower, and liberate more than 1 million people. Furthermore, he intended to attack two or three enemy regiments or brigades, i.e. essentially wipe out the enemy's II Corps, liberate nearly all of Military Region II, and prevent the restoration of II Corps, while reducing the puppets total troop strength by 20 to 25 percent. That was also a matter of strategic annihilation.

The next day, on 20 March, while our troops were pursuing enemy troops fleeing in three directions (Route 7 to Phu Tuc, Route 21 to Khanh Duong, and Route 19 to An Khe), in message No 57 Dung estimated that within a few more days our troops in the Central Highlands would follow the enemy down into the lowlands via those three routes (route 7 to Phu Yen, Route 21 to Ninh Hoa and then Nha Trang and Cam Ranh, and Route 19 to Binh Dinh). He also recommended that only the 316th Division be sent when the B2 theater needed additional forces, and recommended that "Because the situation is changing by the hour we should not hold a general meeting (B3, Military Region 5, and Nam Bo), but should send brief directives from the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, and immediately send people to disseminate their directives to each battlefield."

On the same day, after receiving a message on the Political Bureau's decision to opt for the first alternate plan, Dung replied:

"With regard to the strategic opportunity and direction, we are in complete agreement (25), but there are some points regarding the organization of implementation which are not yet clear vis-a-vis their requirements and deadline, because at present our troops are still exerting pressure on the fleeing enemy and are pursuing them eastward. We are discussing ways to carry out that decision but it is necessary to take into consideration the time required to withdraw troops for reorganization, studying and operational plan, and preparing the battlefield, and also the time required to move the Central Highlands forces to the new battlefield before the onset of the rainy season."

Dung's message arrived late. In order not to affect the troops' operations, on 22 March the General Staff sent two consecutive messages from the Military Commission to the Central Highlands. The first message, which was brief and concise, was intended to put Dung at ease with regard to the direction of developing the offensive by the B3 troops which had been approved by the Political Bureau. Immediately thereafter a long message was sent which recalled the Political Bureau's assessment of the enemy's plot and the Political Bureau's 18 March decision to defeat the enemy's plan and rapidly implement our strategic plan in the key direction.

Then the secretary of the Military Commission sent a message which stated:

"After receiving your message (i.e. Dung's message No. 57) I discussed it with Sau Tho and requested the opinion of Ba. They agree with the plan to develop and use forces discussed in your message."

[29 Apr 86]

[Text] The cadres and men were encouraged to have strong determination to pursue and annihilate enemy manpower and liberate the coastal provinces, including Nha Trang and Cam Ranh. We had to draft a plan to supplement cadres and equipment, rapidly develop forces in the liberated localities, entrust the consolidation of localities to the on-the-spot forces, and concentrate forces as soon as possible so that they could be consolidated, while urgently making all-round preparations in the key areas."

Van also informed dung of the major features of the operational plan in the various areas, and sent cadres south to explain the decisions of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission to Pham Hung (B2) and Vo Chi Cong (Military Region 5), and to discuss their implementation on the basis of the specific situation.

Since mid-March the battlefield situation had changed with increasing rapidity, which proved the correctness of the Political Bureau's observations during its meeting on the 18th.

The Central Highlands campaign had essentially concluded in victory. By 24 March the enemy troops had been cleared of nearly all enemy troops.

On the northern Military Region 1 battlefield the enemy had evacuated Quang Tri and withdrawn to defend a line along the My Chanh River.

News of victories poured into the General headquarters. Whether early in the morning or late at night, communications and cryptanalysis personnel assigned to Zone A received and decoded messages with the utmost urgency and greatest accuracy so that they could be taken in a timely manner to the operations duty officer. The communications and cryptanalysis personnel had been educated with regard to the importance of work of each person and element during those days of urgency and continuous victories.

During that period, in which we received a flood of good news, it had almost become customary that every afternoon Van would cross Hoang Dieu Street in the direction of the western gate, go to the operations duty office, and remain there until late at night. Sometimes he would sleep in the conference room of the Military Commission. At night he would take in the latest news from the battlefields, exchange opinions with us and the duty officers, and visit the communications and cryptanalysis personnel on duty there. Sometimes he would stand silent for long periods of time before a battle map hung on the wall of the operations room, or walk in the courtyard of the "Dragon House." At such times he was thinking, assessing and evaluating the situation, and preparing opinions to report to and exchange opinions with the members of the Political Bureau and Military Commission on the following morning.

It had also become habitual that on those memorable last days of March practically every morning the members of the Political Bureau would go to the "Dragon House" in Zone A in the citadel to hold meetings. The situation was developing very rapidly and many different things were happening, which caused us to feel that every hour and every day new problems were posed which we had to monitor closely, discuss collectively, and provide timely guidance. Two-way and three-way discussions were interspersed with exchanges of views and briefings.

During the past several days we members of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee exchanged opinions about liberating Da Nang. The enemy were in the process of forming an enclave. The situation was developing very rapidly. We had to take full advantage of the strategic opportunity, while our forces in the Central Highlands were pursuing the enemy. We estimated that we could attack Da Nang in accordance with one of two scenarios: 1. The enemy withdrawing rapidly after having evacuated Hue; 2. They would withdraw in stages, form an enclave and then withdraw. When we began to discuss the matter, the first scenario was selected. How should we use our forces, in addition to the divisions on the spot? Should 1st Corps be sent to Da Nang, and could it arrive in time? Tan was preparing to report the Political Bureau meeting on the 25th. On the morning of the 24th, however, information poured in from the Tri Thien and Quang Da battlefields, which caused both the Political Bureau and the Military Commission to realize that they should meet earlier, on the afternoon of that day, 24 March.

Tri Thien had begun the second step of the second phase of the spring-summer campaign 3 days previously. North of Da Nang, 2nd Corps and the Tri Thien Military Region had received orders from the High Command to attack down into the lowlands, take the preselected objective, cut Route 1, and close in on the Phu Bai airfield and the city of Hue. There were many signs that the enemy were hastily evacuating Hue.

Military Region 5 had also begun the second phase of the spring-summer campaign 3 days previously. South of Da Nang, we had taken a number of objectives at Dong Thang Binh, had completely liberated the rural areas in Son Tinh and Binh son districts, and we developing the attack to liberate the city of Tam Ky.

During the meeting held on the afternoon of 24 March, after listening to our summary briefing on the situation since the 18 March meeting, Ba reviewed the major milestones during the past several years, since the Paris Agreement. From the beginning, Military Region 9 had held high the offensive flag, with no illusions, and had resolutely held its ground and contributed valuable experience regarding determination to defeat the enemy's pacification and encroachment schemes. Then came the victory at Thuong Duc (Military Region 5), in which the enemy's strategic mobile forces received a heavy blow. The comparison of forces changed. Then there was Phuoc Long (eastern Nam Bo) and then the Central Highlands. The enemy were forming strategic enclaves and were ultimately aiming toward the defense of Saigon.

Then Ba brought out topics discussion. The line of thought was clearly focused on the final strategic objective: Saigon.

In Nam Bo, specifically the Saigon area, should we wait until all forces, especially the main-force units of the B3 theater, arrived before beginning, or should we begin with only three main-force divisions and the on-the-spot units? Within a few more days the taking of Hue would be completed. Da Nang would also be a large-scale war-deciding battle in which three or four enemy divisions would be annihilated. We should not wait until Hue was taken before beginning the attack on Da Nang. We had to immediately use our on-the-spot force (the 711th Division) to take a staging area and put pressure on Da Nang. After Hue, the enemy would have to withdraw from Da Nang. Clearly, we had to carry out the attack in accordance with the scenario of the enemy withdrawing rapidly.

The aspects that were discussed were all relevant to the agenda that the General Staff was preparing to report during the official meeting to be held on the following day, 25 March.

All members of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission attended the meeting.

During the meeting Le Trong Tan, on behalf of the General Staff, reported on capabilities for taking Tri Thien-Hue early. With the annihilation of three to four regiments, the rout of the remaining local forces, and the capturing of all of the enemy's heavy equipment, we would win a great victory. The enemy forces forming an enclave at Da Nang included two divisions (the marine division and the 3rd Division), and two or three ranger groups, in all the equivalent of 10 regiments. It was possible that they would withdraw to Da Nang more rapidly. We had to quickly attack Da Nang and wipe out two or three more enemy divisions in April to prevent the enemy from forming an enclave around Saigon. In general, we could fulfill the mission of liberating the South earlier than expected. It would be especially good if the South could be liberated in the fall of 1975.

Van discussed at greater length the question of whether the enemy would form an enclave at Da Nang or evacuate. Previously we had foreseen both possibilities. There were now clear signs that the enemy intended to withdraw. But would they withdraw slowly or rapidly? We had to prepare to fight under the circumstances of the enemy withdrawing rapidly. We did not have to wait until Hue was taken before beginning the attack on Da Nang. The attack on Da Nang had to be regarded as having already begun. We had to quickly take the high ground. The tanks had to penetrate deeply. The artillery had to be deployed as rapidly as possible. In the Saigon area, we had planned to use seven divisions. Now the General Staff had nine divisions at its disposal. Later, one corps would be added, which would increase the total to 12 divisions. After Da Nang we would have yet another corps, which would bring the total to 15 divisions. The requirement for May was to take Saigon. Forces from Long An would put pressure on Saigon from the south-west. Stronger, more rapid forces had to be added northwest of Saigon. We should, and could, win final victory in May, because in April, after the collapse of Da Nang, the enemy would be even weaker.

Pham Van Dong stressed the necessity of attacking rapidly and winning

victories rapidly. To win rapid victories, technical military equipment was necessary but the forces had to be elite and efficient. It was necessary to bring into play the leading role of the military forces, but we should not rely on military forces alone. It would be best to combine attacks by military forces with mass uprisings. That would be the optimal policy.

Le Duc Tho reminded us that our previous strategic plan had called for completely liberating the South within 2 years. Its contents had not changed but its pace had been hastened. We would have to carry out the Central Highlands, Da Nang, and Saigon campaigns in less than a year. The general offensive began in the Central Highlands and would end at Saigon. After Da Nang we would have two reserve corps, we still had much ammunition, and we had good mobility. The Saigon campaign would have to begin immediately. The B2 forces had surrounded Saigon. The only problem was that the on-the-spot forces were not sufficiently large.

Truong Chinh agreed with the General Staff plan but thought that it had to be carried out more positively. It was necessary to be very urgent and take great leaps forward, not proceed at an ordinary pace. Combining attacks and uprisings would be the best policy. Today's victories were a continuation of the spring of 1968, of the 1972 strategic offensive, and of more than 10 years of fighting the United States.

Ba stressed the urgent requirement of preparing for mass uprisings. If there was a mass uprising in Da Nang and the enemy collapsed, Saigon would be in great danger.

After profoundly analyzing all aspects of the enemy's situation and our situation, and the battlefield situation, ultimately the Political Bureau affirmed that a major strategic opportunity had arisen. Never before in the 20 years of the anti-U.S. resistance war for national salvation had there been such a favorable opportunity. The revolutionary war in the South had entered a phase of accelerated development. The conference foresaw that it would be possible to win victory much easier than called for by the previous plan. We had to take advantage of the remaining several months of good weather. To stretch things out would not be to our advantage.

Those conclusions resulted in a new decision: firmly grasping the strategic opportunity, making good use of time, concentrating forces in the principal direction, acting boldly and with the element of surprise, preventing the enemy from learning of our intentions in time, and fulfilling the mission of liberating Saigon before the onset of the rainy season.

If that was to be accomplished, we had to wage two more strategic war-deciding battles: Hue-Da Nang and Saigon. The Da Nang battle would create additional conditions for the final decisive battle: Saigon.

The Political Bureau and the Military Commission decided to organize a Quang-Da front and pointed Le Trong Tan commander and Chu Huy Man the political officer. They also decided to organize 3rd Corps and appointed Vu Lang its commander and Dang Vu Hiep its political officer.

The staff organ urgently worked to complete the plan to liberate Da Nang so that the standing committee of the Military Commission could approve it on the following day, 26 March, and along with the rear services organ sent forces, both troops and technical materials, to support the campaign. With regard to materiel, because we had planned ahead we had coordinated with the Rear Services General Department since 20 March and had made all-out efforts to provide for the campaign 26,000 tons of supplies all kinds.

A major advantage at that time was that the Council to Aid the South had been set up and was chaired by Pham Van Dong. I remembered a similar event that had occurred more than 20 years ago.

[30 Apr 86]

[Text] When the 1953-1954 winter-spring strategic offensive had developed to its highest point, the Political Bureau decided to wipe out the complex of strongpoints at Dien Bien Phu. A Council to Aid the Front was set up, also headed by Pham Van Dong, to mobilize manpower and materiel for the front, in accordance with the slogan, "All for the front, all for victory. The historic Dien Bien Phu campaign was completely victorious. The same was true now. The decision to liberate Saigon before the rainy season was a correct, very bold decision that was made on the basis of objective, scientific analysis of the battlefield situation, the comparison of forces between the enemy and ourselves, and the great strategic opportunity that had risen.

That strategic decision met the aspirations and sentiment of our entire party, population, and army. For the scale of the final victory of the enterprise of national salvation, the people in the great rear area of the North were prepared to continue to aid the great front line in the South with all their manpower and materiel. There had to be a vast, strong organization headed by a leadership cadre with prestige and experience, on behalf of the party and state, to mobilize and organize the strength of the entire population, oriented toward the common goal of liberating Saigon and the South. The Council To Aid the South was especially important because the scale of mobilization was very great and it had to be carried out within a very brief period of time, so that final victory could be won at the front before the rainy season. Another specific matter that caused the staff and rear services organs, which had been very worried, was that the war booty was now very plentiful. The units had received strict orders to take over, deliver, and carefully maintain that equipment, and prepare it as well as possible for use in the key area.

The departments of the General Staff sent experienced and capable cadres to help Tan guide and command the Quang Nam-Da Nang front.

One thing we were worried about at that time was that although the campaign plan had been approved and Tan was preparing urgently to set out, the situation was changing very rapidly and our troops were entering Hue. How could Tan meet with Man, who was coming north from Military Region 5, to discuss the plan to guide and command the campaign in such a way as to meet the requirements of "as timely as possible, as rapidly as possible, as boldly as possible, as unexpectedly as possible, and winning certain victory."

The Operations Department was directed to closely monitor the situation and the movement of the forces sent to the Quang Da front, and promptly report so that the General Staff in the rear could assist the Quang Da Command, so that the opportunity would not be lost, at a time before the front command had time to carry out its organization and command work.

In mid-March, because the Central Highlands Campaign was developing well, the General Staff relayed a directive from the Military Commission to Military Region 5 to step up the offensive in the northern part of the military region and rapidly advance down to Route 1, after taking a number of positions in the contiguous area, while making urgent preparations for the developmental steps to follow.

When it was learn that the enemy were sending Marine forces to Da Nang so that the airborne division could be withdrawn to Nam Bo to serve as a mobile force, the General Staff sent a series of orders to the Tri Thien Military Region and 2nd Corps to breach the outer defensive perimeter and boldly send forces down into the lowlands to kill the tyrants, destroy the enemy's control apparatus, cut Route 1, take the Phu Loc and Huong Dien district seats, and not stop at My Chanh but urgently break through to Cu Thuan, interdict the airfield, put pressure on and liberate Hue, and prevent the enemy's 1st Division from escaping.

Between the 22nd and 26th of March (during which time our troops liberated Hue and tightly surrounded the enemy and Cua Thuan and Cua Tu Hien, and threatened Da Nang from the north). The General Staff relayed the Military Commission's 24 March directive to Military Region 5: it had to advance in the direction of Da Nang and coordinate with 2nd Corps in surrounding Da Nang from many sides. The General Staff also ordered 2nd Corps to inspect the artillery positions at the Mui Trau pass and urgently prepare firepower so that on the 27th it could shell the airfield and port at Da Nang, while also taking the Hai Van Pass area and preparing a staging area from which to attack and take the Lien Chau gasoline storage area and attack and annihilate enemy forces forming an enclave at Da Nang.

The messages which were sent, one after the other, from the General Staff to the Tri Thien and Quang Da battlefields expressed the extremely urgent requirement of putting pressure on, surrounding, dividing, attacking, and annihilating the enemy during this, the second strategic phase.

The leadership and command comrades of the Central Vietnam battlefields mobilized and organized the troops to overcome all difficulties, take advantage of favorable opportunities, and resolutely rush forward to win great victories in each military region.

In Tri Thien, at a meeting on 17 March the standing committee of the military region party committee and the standing committee of the front party committee concluded that the enemy were highly agitated and a favorable new opportunity had arisen. The conference made the urgent and bold decision of using the on-the-spot forces to strongly attack the enemy's defense line, while sending down main-force units to, along with the local armed forces and the people,

resolutely cut Route 1, divide and destroy the enemy troop concentrations, win victory in the lowlands, and surround and isolate Hue. On 19 March the armed forces of Quang Tri attacked and completely liberated the rest of the province. On the following day, 20 March, the standing committee the Tri Thien Military Region party committee, taking advantage of the opportunity, made all out efforts to, along with parts of 2nd Corps, liberate Thua Thien-Hue by means of a combined, all-round offensive, the main method of which was to divide and surround the enemy, in coordination with the deep penetration columns of the main-force units, while also using local forces to support mass uprisings. Between 21 and 23 March the troops of 2nd Corps and the Tri Thien Military Region broke through into the lowlands, took the preselected objectives, cut Route 1, and moved close to Hue. Because of the strength of our offensive, during the night of the 24th the enemy fled from Hue to Cua Thuan and Cu Tu Hien. On the following day the inner-city infrastructure and commando forces encouraged the masses to arise, eliminate the enemy administration, and guide the main-force troops in capturing the important objectives in the city. On 25 March our troop columns, coordinating with heavy artillery, had closed off Cua Thuan and Cua Tu Hien in advance, and annihilated, captured, or routed most of the enemy troops with drawing by sea.

In Military Region 5, the 16 March conference of the standing committee of the military region and the military region command determined that the objectives of the second phase of the spring-summer offensive would be to liberate Quang Ngai and Binh Dinh provinces and take most of the rural lowlands. Seven days later on 23 March, we had liberated a number of areas in Dong Thang Binh and the lowlands Son Tinh and Binh Son districts. The standing committee of the military region quickly made the decision to "liberate all of Military Region in the shortest possible time. After 5 days of fighting we had liberated the city of Tam Ky, taken the Tuan Duong base, expanded our staging area in eastern Quang Nam, completely liberated the province of Quang Ngai, attacked and captured the Chu Lai base, and annihilated the puppet 2nd Division. The southern part of the enemy's Military Region I was liberated and the Da Nang bases were threatened from both the north and the south.

Thus, implementing the guiding thought of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission, the Tri Thien and Military Region 5, along with 2nd Corps, stepped up their activities, coordinated effectively with the Central Highlands battlefield, attacked and annihilated an important part of the enemy forces in their Military Region 1, and prepared for the next step, taking the Da Nang military base complex.

With the liberation of Hue, Tam Ky, and Chu Lai, and the annihilation and disintegration of the principal forces of the puppet's I Corps, we had destroyed to an important degree the enemy's plan to form strategic enclaves along the central coast, and were threatening Da Nang from many directions. The enemy were forced to abandon their plan to withdraw their marine division from Da Nang, and had to use the remaining forces to defend Da Nang, their last important base in Military Region I, in hopes of holding up our main-force units in the north, so that they could have time to redeploy their strategic defenses in the South. The enemy troops there still numbered about 100,000, but they were isolated, their morale had collapsed, and their

organization and command were chaotic. Tens of thousands of people from Tri Thien and Hue had been forced into Da Nang, which greatly increased the enemy's difficulties.

Because of our urgent and bold activities, by the 27th the situation in Da Nang had become very hot. The General Staff informed Military Region 5 of the assessment and order of the Military Commission that especially rapid steps had to be taken to attack the enemy from the south, bypass objectives along the way, and enter Da Nang as rapidly, promptly, and boldly as possible, with forces that could be brought up quickly. The General Staff also ordered 2nd Corps to rapidly send additional forces from the north-west, deploy additional artillery positions to interdict the airfield, the port, and ships to prevent the enemy from withdrawing, concentrate forces to carry out surprise attacks along Route 14 and Route 1, annihilate the enemy, take the areas west and north-west of the city, penetrate deeply to take the Trinh Minh The bridge, and prevent the enemy from withdrawing from the Son Tra Peninsula.

Carrying out the order of the High Command, the commands of 2nd Corps and Military Region 5 quickly deployed forces and attacked Da Nang from many directions: 2nd Corps from the north, the northwest, and the southwest, and the 2nd Division of Military Region 5 from the south and southeast. The masses in the city, under the leadership of the provincial party committee and the municipal party committee, arose and effectively supported the main-force columns advancing in the direction of Da Nang from all directions. Thousands of people in Da Nang, in private automobiles, buses, three-wheeled Lambrettas, and even Hondas came out to await our troops, who were advancing rapidly into the city. Ten of thousands of people in the outskirts gave rice, water, and gifts to the troops, who were advancing along the main roads into Da Nang. The Da nang self-defense forces guided our troops to the primary objectives in the city, such as city hall, the air field, the air force command, the headquarters of the puppet I Corps, and develop the attack into the Son Tra Peninsula. The commando, self-defense, and secret guerrilla forces, in coordination with the internal infrastructure, took advantage of the enemy's chaos and disintegration in the face of the main-force troops' strong attacks to quickly occupy the important objectives in the city. Our cadres and men who had been imprisoned by the enemy at the Non Nuoc prison arose, took over the jail, and joined the people in appealing for the enemy to surrender and defending the economic installations in the city.

Thanks to the timely, responsive guidance of the General Staff, and the urgent, bold actions of the troops from all directions and in each column, with the close coordination of the timely arising of the masses, by 1500 on 29 March our soldiers and people had annihilated or routed more than 100,000 of the enemy at the Da Nang base complex, completely mastered the city, and brilliantly fulfilled the strategic mission set forth by the General Staff for the second phase of the offensive.

When it heard a report on the campaign to liberate Da Nang, the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission observed that new factors had appeared in the course of the actual guidance of the offensive and uprising. On 30 March a group of staff cadres, including cadres from the Military Science Institute, the Operations Department. The Intelligence Department,

and the Militia Department were ordered to go to Da Nang immediately to study experiences in guiding the application of the mode of attacks by main-force units combined with the organization of mass uprisings in an offensive campaign to liberate a large city.

Having been fiercely shaken by our lightning blows in the Central Highlands, now, after our resounding victory at Da Nang the puppet leaders in the provinces of Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Khanh Hoa hastily fled. The Americans began to evacuate their offices and consulate at Nha Trang and to transfer materiel from Cam Ranh to Saigon. From that we concluded that the enemy may also abandon Cam Ranh.

[1 May 1986]

[Text] After fulfilling their mission of liberating the Central Highlands, our 3rd Corps and other units were ordered to rapidly develop their attack southward to liberate the provinces in the coastal lowlands of Military Region 5. Between 26 March and 3 April our main-force troops, coordinating with the on-the-spot armed forces and local people, annihilated and disintegrated the remaining elements of the puppet II Corps, and liberated Binh Dinh (31 March 1975, except for the city of Qui Nhon, which was liberated on 1 April 1975) and Khanh Hoa (including the city of Nha Trang and the military port at Cam Ranh on 1 April 1975).

During the same period, in the B2 theater our troops surrounded, and forced the enemy to withdraw from, An Loc, Chau Thanh, and Gia Nghia. The 7th Division, a regional main-force unit, developed its attack to Route 20 and, in coordination with the forces of Military Region 6, liberated Di Linh, Bao Loc, and Da Lat.

The situation continued to change very rapidly. The strategic opportunity was extremely favorable. Against that historical background, on 31 March the Political Bureau met to discuss the matter of winning victory in the key area: Saigon.

During the meeting, the Political Bureau listened to a Military Commission report on the development of the general offensive of our soldiers and people during the past week, especially the last days of March.

Following the Phuoc Long, and with the great victory on the Central Highlands battlefield, our strategic general offensive had truly begun. With a very brief period of time, a little more than a month, we had won extremely great victories.

On the battlefields, from the Central Highlands, Hue, and Da Nang, to the secondary battlefields, we had annihilated or disintegrated more than 35 percent of the enemy forces. For the first time we had annihilated and knocked out of action two puppet military regions and two corps, totaling about 40 percent of their modern technical forces, took over or destroyed more than 40 percent of their material and rear services bases, liberated 12 provinces, and increased the total number of people in the liberated areas to 8 million.

The conference unanimously agreed that new factors had clearly emerged in the Da Nang battle. Military attacks were combined with mass uprisings; once the people's anger toward the enemy had risen to a high degree they would, once the opportunity appeared, arise to take over political power; and most of the enemy officers and men had lost the will to fight. That explained why, within only 23 hours, with armed forces smaller than those of the enemy, we quickly wiped out the largest military base complex of the puppets in central Vietnam.

As for our armed forces, several weeks into the general offensive the Political Bureau concluded that an important maturization step had been taken. Our troops had suffered few casualties, weapons and ammunition had been used properly and economically, and their will to fight and win and their command and combat experience were increased. We had captured a very large quantity of weapons and ammunition from the enemy and the mobility capability of the main-force troops was multiplied. The Political Bureau affirmed that with regard to our strategic position and military and political forces, we had the strength to overwhelm the enemy troops. The puppets were facing the peril of collapse. The United States had proved to be completely impotent, and by that time even if they increased their aid they could not prevent the puppets from collapsing. Our country's revolution was developing more seethingly than ever, at the rate of one day equaling 20 years. The revolutionary war in the South had not only entered a phase of accelerated development but the strategic opportunity to carry out a general offensive and general uprising was ripe. The strategic war-deciding attack by our soldiers and people against the final lair of the enemy had begun,, with the goal of completing the people's democratic national revolution in the South and unify the fatherland.

The Political Bureau made the decision to grasp the strategic opportunity more tightly, with the guiding thoughts of miraculous speed, boldness, surprise, certain victory, and determination to carry out the general offensive and general uprising as soon as possible, best of all in April, without being tardy.

Certain victory and surprise were at that time primarily a matter of making good use of time, attacking the enemy while they were confused and in a state of collapse, and concentrating even more forces to take the key objectives at each time and in each area. At that time, time was strength.

The Political Bureau affirmed that our strategic operational mode would be to strongly develop all three strategic blows (main-force, rural, and urban); combine attacks with uprisings, attacking inward from without and outward from within; concentrate forces to overwhelm the enemy troops in all areas and at all times; rapidly create new advantages; and quickly take advantage of the opportunity to rapidly develop our victories.

With regard to deploying our strategic forces, the Political Bureau adopted the policy of accelerating the pace by urgently increasing our forces west of Saigon, quickly fulfilling the mission of carrying out a strategic division and encirclement from the southwest, put pressure on Saigon, completely cut Route 4, and cut Saigon off from the Mekong Delta, while also rapidly

concentrating forces to the east, taking important objectives, and completely surrounding and isolating Saigon from Ba Ria and Vung Tau; and readying truly strong main-force fists, including technical military equipment, so that when the opportunity arose we could immediately and directly attack the most vital and important enemy objectives in the center of Saigon. Meanwhile, we urged our military and political forces in the Mekong Delta to act boldly and, combining attacks with uprisings, liberate the localities.

In order to deploy our forces in accordance with the above strategic operational mode, so that we could meet the time requirements, we had to immediately draft a bold plan of action for the forces already present in eastern Nam Bo. The Political Bureau decided to quickly send 3rd Corps and technical military equipment down from the Central Highlands, while also sending 1st Corps--the strategic reserves--down from the North. But in order to make maximum use of time, we should not wait until all reinforcements had arrived. We also had to avoid irrational redeployments, which would affect the time for acting.

With regard to the organization of command, the Political Bureau decided to set up a Saigon Front Command and party organization to centralize and unify leadership and command. COSVN and the Regional Military Commission would continue to fulfill their current missions. They were still responsible for the B2 theater.

The last day of March concluded with a Political Bureau meeting of special historical importance. The strategic direction had been determined explicitly and definitively.

In my life of combat, I had never experienced such days of resounding victories and "miraculously rapid" development as during that memorable March. When drafting the basic 2-year strategic plan under the guidance of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, we never thought that during the second phase of the 1975 strategic plan the battlefield situation would undergo such a rapid transformation. The great and repeated victories far exceeded the initial expectations.

The responsive and time guidance in organizing implementation by all echelons of our party, from the Political Bureau and the Military Commission down to the battlefields and localities, added to our secret, unexpected, urgent, and rapid actions and brave, resolute, intelligent, and creative fighting methods, forced the enemy into making mistakes. We promptly exacerbated their errors, caused the enemy's battlefield situation, from the Central Highlands to Hue-Da Nang, to become chaotic, smashed their scheme to form strategic enclaves, annihilated or disintegrated hundreds of thousands of enemy troops, and liberated an area comprising 16 provinces and 6 municipalities and cities in two enemy military regions. It is very clear that in guiding a war or commanding a campaign or battle it is necessary to find clever stratagems and carry out plans skillfully to deceive the enemy and cause them to make errors. And once they make errors we must take advantage of the opportunity in a timely manner and create opportunities to win the greatest possible victories.

Thus our direct rear area in the South was expanded very broadly and was

connected with the great rear area in the socialist North. Our soldiers and people had overwhelming superiority over the enemy troops and our troops' fighting will was stronger than ever. Our main-force units had advanced from being capable of annihilating enemy divisions to annihilating their corps. March, with a series of strategic war-deciding battles, signified the very strong development of the party's war-guiding art and an outstanding step toward maturization of our troops with regard to their operational level and capability. At the same time, it also signified a complete change in the comparison of forces between the enemy and ourselves, and in the battlefield situation. It signified a fundamental turning point in the revolutionary war in the South, which was about to begin the final strategic, war-deciding battle.

March 1975 may be called a miraculous month in the history of the revolution and revolutionary war in the South. It was a month in which there were "marvelously rapid" advances, in which one day equaled 20 years. It was a month during which there were four meetings of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, a month in which our party's strategic guidance developed to a new peak.

But that memorable March was nearly over. The historic month of April was about to begin. The rainy season would begin in another month. Time was strength. That fact not only motivated the battlefields but also motivated us, members of the general headquarters organ of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee.

During that period, it seemed as if all echelons, sectors, organs, units, and localities all over the country, especially the strategic organ of the high command, were looking toward the key battlefield: Saigon. The general slogan, "All for the front, all for victory," had in fact become a specific slogan for our entire party, army, and population: "All for the key battlefield."

Chapter Six

All For The Key Battlefield

After the 31 March meeting of the Political Bureau, the general headquarters organ began the first days of April with a seething atmosphere and an unusually urgent pace, greater even than during the historic month of March. All individuals, all elements, and all forces raced with time, made all-out efforts for the key battlefield, and contributed worthily to the total victory of the campaign to liberate Saigon during April, and to carrying out the strategic decision of the high command.

We confirmed that the mission of the General Staff at that time was to concentrate to a high degree on some very important tasks that were directly related to the final strategic, war-deciding battle:

First, monitoring the situation and helping the upper echelon to guide the battlefields to set the stage for the campaign to liberate Saigon, especially to guide the coastal column, which was fighting its way to reach the assembly area by the designated time.

Second, supervising and monitoring the deployment of strategic forces and heavy technical equipment to the key battlefield--Saigon--as rapidly as possible.

Third, study in in order to recommend strategic and campaign fighting methods in the final, war-deciding battle.

[3 May 86]

[Text] In fulfilling the first and second missions, the General Staff at the same time had to meet two seemingly contradictory strategic requirements with regard to the column advancing down the coast of central Vietnam.

On the one hand, the enemy were in the process of forming strategic enclaves, so we had to annihilate them rapidly to weaken them and defeat their strategic scheme while they were in the process of forming strategic enclaves and create favorable conditions for the key battlefield: Saigon. To do so would be to expand the liberated area and rapidly master the important strategic areas along the central coast south of Nha Trang, including Cam Ranh, the most important military port, and not give the enemy time to destroy the port's technical equipment and not allow them time to take the people from the southernmost part of Trung Bo with them. Those were the immediate missions of the coastal column, which was formed at the beginning of April 1975.

But on the other hand, a very strict requirement of that column was to accelerate its rate of advance so that it could arrive at the assembly point on time and participate in the campaign to liberate Saigon. That column had

to fight the enemy as it went, while assimilating large units along the way and forming combat formations immediately. It had to continue to resolve problems regarding rear services, equipment, and transportation problems to maintain its rate of advance. That was also an urgent mission of that very important column en route to the key battlefield.

In the flexible deployment and use of forces so that the units could fulfill both units--annihilating and liberating the land and also arriving at the assembly area on time to participate in the campaign to liberate Saigon--it is necessary to mention the case of the utilization of the 10th Division (of 3rd Corps in the Central Highlands). (26) At the end of March that division was the closest to Nha Trang and was most capable of moving rapidly down the coast.

Before the coastal column was formed, that division was fighting the enemy on Route 21. In accordance with the strategic decision of the Political Bureau (to rapidly send the B3 forces to the key battlefield), at the end of March Dung and the Central Highlands command had the 10th Division (as well as the other B3 units) withdraw units to the rear for consolidation, while the other units, after turning over to the 25th Regiment its mission of fighting the enemy on Route 21, would also disengage and move at top speed to the B2 theater.

En route to the South, on 1 April Sau Tho (27) sent a message to Ba and Van recommending that the 10th Division should not continue to develop its attack in the direction of Cam Ranh and then follow the coast down to the B2 theater, but should move urgently from the Central Highlands to the key battlefield. Tho thought that the forces of Military Region 5, added to part of the Central Highlands forces, would be sufficiently strong to liberate Qui Nhon-Binh Dinh and then develop their attack southward to Phu Yen, Khanh Ho, Cam Ranh, and even Phan Rang and Phan Thiet. The leadership comrades of Military Region 5 were experienced in the combined use of the three types of troops and in combining attacks with uprisings.

But 2 days previously the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee had, on the basis of the actual situation, changed their intentions with regard to using that division. On 30 March, when it heard a General Staff report on the situation, the Military Commission realized that after the enemy were defeated at Da Nang a new situation was developing in the southernmost part of Trung Bo especially after the liberation of Qui Nhon. The enemy were withdrawing from Tuy Hoa and had begun to withdraw the U.S. consulate and puppet apparatus in Nha Trang and Cam Ranh to Saigon. It predicted that the enemy could even abandon Cam Ranh. In view of that situation, after the briefing the Political Bureau and the standing committee of the Military Commission agreed that we needed to have a truly flexible policy to take advantage of that specific opportunity, so they decided to use the 10th Division to quickly annihilate the remaining airborne troops and other enemy troops on route 21, rapidly advance southward to take Nha Trang and Cam Ranh, then advance southward along the coast. Thus it would annihilate the enemy while they were retreating and liberate one of the most important military ports before the enemy could destroy it while also developing our status of continuous victories and open up another route for

attacking Saigon from the east without appreciably affecting the timetable.

That decision was immediately relayed to the Central Highlands theater on 30 March (message No 940).

That decision was entirely in accordance with the thoughts of Dung and the Central Highlands Command.

During the night of 30 March (before they received message No 940 from the Military Commission), Dung and the Central Highlands command also discussed using the 10th Division and the 25th Regiment to develop the attack southward and take Nha Trang and Cam Ranh, after which the division would take Route 11 to Route 20 and then go to eastern Nam Bo. Thus it would annihilate the remaining forces of the puppet II Corps and liberate another important strategic area but still have sufficient time to move to the key battlefield. Although they had made that decision they were still concerned that using the division in that manner would be contrary to the policy of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission prior to 30 March: quickly sending the B3 forces to eastern Nam Bo.

While Dung and our comrades in the B3 theater were carrying out the decision they had made during the night of 30 March, with the intention of "accepting responsibility, then reporting to the Military Commission and the Political bureau," they received message north which stated, "I am very pleased because of the coincidence of views between the leaders and the people on the battlefield."

The next day, 31 March, in replying to Tho's message Van stated that the 10th Division, which was fighting the airborne troops, would advance and attack Nha Trang and Cam Ranh, then continue to develop its attack down the coast, annihilating the enemy while liberating a large military port and misleading the enemy.

After the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee determined the direction of development of the 10th Division's attack, on 1 April the General Staff reported the enemy's situation to the division and urged it to take advantage of every hour and every minute to develop its attack as rapidly as possible in the direction of Nha Trang and Cam Ranh. The message stated that if necessary it should send a small unit in advance to prevent the enemy from destroying technical bases and load the people aboard ships. At the same time, we received information that the headquarters of the puppet II Corps and 3rd Airborne Division were fleeing in panic by road in the direction of Saigon, and during the night of 1 April had stopped at Phan Rang. In addition to the message sent to the division, the General Staff immediately informed Military Region 5 to promptly mobilize forces, including the 25th Regiment on Route 1 and the 95B Regiment on Route 7 to, along with the on-the-spot forces, coordinate in attacking enemy troops fleeing in the direction of Tuy Hoa, Nha Trang, and Cam Ranh. At the same time, it sent a message to Military Region 6 ordering it to use the on-the-spot forces along Route 1 to coordinate with the 10th Division in stopping and annihilating the enemy. The next day we received information by technical means that the enemy were using about 3,000 vehicles to withdraw troops from

Cam Ranh to Saigon. By the morning of 2 April the convoy had reached the area of Binh Thuan. They thought that because Route 1 had been cut near Xuan Loc their only course was to flee along the coast road through Ham Tan and Ba Ria to Vung Tau. The General Staff sent messages to Military Region 6 and Military Region 7 ordering them to immediately use the armed forces in Binh Tuy and Phuoc Tuy to seek all ways to stop the enemy, including the destruction of roads and small unit actions, to slow down their retreat. The two military regions were also informed that the 110th Division of the Central Highlands theater was attacking to liberate Nha Trang and Cam Ranh, and would coordinate with the local forces in pursuing and annihilating enemy troops fleeing south through Phan Rang and Phan Thiet. Military regions 6 and 7 had to coordinate immediately with the 10th Division in fighting the enemy. As areas were liberated they were to use local troops to take over their administration so that the division could continue to advance rapidly to eastern Nam Bo.

Van sent another message to Tho, who was still en route to the Regional Command, informing him of the situation of the units which were making their way to the B2 theater, including the 10th Division, which had annihilated the enemy airborne brigade and was advancing southward. To put him at ease, the message stated, "with regard to time, according to Dung, that will require no more time than turning around and taking the old route. We feel that that is advantageous and Ba agrees."

The next day, 3 April, the General Staff received a message from Tho to Ba and Van, also sent to Dung, which agreed with the decisions of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission. The message stated, "If the 10th Division has advanced that far south, we should consider having it and another division from Military Region 5 liberate Phan Rang and Phan Thiet and advance south to liberate Ba Ria and O Cap. The mission of Military Region 5 has been fulfilled and we may withdraw a division to join forces with the 10th Division. That would be very unexpected, and we could quickly approach Saigon from the east. Although the supply line might be stretched out, we could take advantage of Route 1 and the transportation facilities of the people in the newly liberated areas to transport cargo more rapidly and conveniently than advancing from eastern Nam Bo."

Thus after 31 March, at a time when the division was urgently developing its attack in the direction of Nha Trang and Cam Ranh, a message in reply resulted in agreement regarding the use of that division and the entire coastal column, the eastern column.

The situation was developing rapidly and the remaining objectives on the coast of the southernmost part of Nam Bo posed an urgent requirement for strategic guidance: to increase the forces of that column, i.e. to increase the forces in the eastern and southeastern parts of the key battlefields. In the messages that were exchanged, Tho and the comrades in the B2 theater and Military Region 5 reached agreement in that regard. On 4 April, Ba and the standing committee of the Military Commission decided to add three divisions--the 3rd Division (then in Binh Dinh), the 325th Division, and the 304th Division (then at Da Nang)--along with artillery, anti-aircraft, tank, and military engineer units to the eastern column. The mission of that column was

to annihilate enemy troops as it advanced, rapidly take Ba Ria and O Cap, block the Long Tau River, and develop the attack in the direction of Saigon from the southeast.

In order to strengthen the guidance and command of the eastern column (made up of 2nd Corps, which was commanded by Nguyen Huu An and the political officer of which was Le Linh, and the 3rd Division and subordinate units), on 5 April Le Trong Tan, Le Quang Hoa, and Nam Long reached Da Nang. Tan was named commander of the eastern column. At the same time, the standing committee of the Military Commission decided to set up a provisional party affairs committee, of which Le Quang Hoa would serve as secretary. Once it reached eastern Nam Bo that column would be under the command of the party committee and command of the Saigon front.

Returning to the "controversy" over using the 10th Division, after liberating Nha Trang and Cam Ranh, with the assistance of the soldiers and people of Military Region 6, the 10th Division moved from Ba Ngoi past the Bac Ai base to Tan My (Route 11) so that it could go to Tuyen Duc, then follow Route 20 to the assembly area of 3rd Corps northwest of Saigon. Thousands of people from Bac Ai District, the homeland of the hero Bi Nang Tac, enthusiastically worked night and day to repair the Ba Ngoi-Tan My road so that the troops could move rapidly.

[3 May 86]

[Text] During that period, the General Staff received information that the enemy had shifted the forward headquarters of III Corps to Xuan Loc, sent the 2nd Airborne Brigade to Phan Rang and strengthened the defenses of that city, and implemented a policy of defense from afar. It also received information that Tan and Hoa had departed Quy Nhon for Nha Trang on the morning of 10 April and could arrive that day, and information that the 325th Division had left Da Nang on 9 April and that the 304th Division would follow.

On 13 April the General Staff received a message from Tan informing it that the rear services situation of 2nd Corps had not encountered many difficulties. The units had been issued food rations for a month. Along its line of advance the corps had captured more than 2,000 tons of rice at Cam Ranh, 245 tons of gasoline and 175 tons of fuel oil at Qui Nhon, 4,000 tons of gasoline and 1,000 tons of fuel oil at Nha Trang, etc. After receiving that report, the standing committee of the Military Commission was no longer worried about capabilities to provide material-technical support for the eastern column, but a way had to be found to send those forces to the key battlefield more rapidly. The standing committee of the Military Commission had reached agreement regarding the missions and direction of advance of 2nd Corps and the 3rd Division. Specifically, after taking Phan Rang they would attack and take the city of Ba Ria and the Vung Tau base, cut the road from Bien Hoa to Vung Tau, and completely block the Long Tau River. If the enemy withdrew to defend Bien Hoa, we would, depending on the specific situation at that time, send forces to advance on Saigon from the east and southeast, which would cross the river and fight their way into that key area.

On 11 April we received information that the enemy might strengthen the

defenses of Phan Rang to stop our advance. Our 968th Division was not accustomed to attacking large strongpoints with solid defenses. We sent a message requesting Tan to find out whether or not much time would be lost in attacking Phan Rang and suggested that in order to advance rapidly to eastern Nam Bo we could consider making a detour, while leaving behind at Phan Rang a unit to surround the enemy and force them to disperse their forces. If we took a detour, we of course would have to overcome difficulties regarding rear services and roads for our technical military equipment.

Several days later, the General Staff received a report which stated that an element of the coastal column commanded by Tan, with the support of the local armed forces of Military Region 6 (28) had taken the Thanh Son airfield and the city of Phan Rang. The guerrillas of Bac Ai Dong had long before moved up to the perimeter of the Thanh Son airfield and had created very favorable circumstances for our main-force troops to attack the enemy. During the night of 7 April sappers, along with Ninh Thuan local troops, penetrated deeply to take the town of Thap Cham, then held positions in the city of Phan Rang. That element had repulsed many enemy counterattacks, then had contributed importantly, along with the main-force troops, to liberating the city of Phan Rang, thus opening the way for the eastern column to accelerate its advance. In Binh Thuan, on 7 April the 812th Regiment (a main-force unit of Military Region 6) moved from Tuyen Duc down to Binh Thuan, on 7 April the 812th Regiment (a main-force unit of Military Region 6) moved from Tuyen Duc down to Binh Thuan and the next day liberated and wiped out the Thien Glao district seat and subsector in Ma Lam District, thus creating conditions for the local armed forces to wipe out the remaining enemy positions. The 812th Regiment held on to Phu Long (the gateway to the city of Phan Thiet) for 5 days, from 14 to 18 April, under fierce enemy artillery bombardment, repulsed many of their counterattacks and, along with 2nd Corps, liberated Phan Thiet.

Thus following the complete liberation of the provinces of Lam Dong (30 March), Tuyen Duc (3 April), Binh Thuan (19 April), and Binh Tuy (23 April), practically all of Military Region 6 had been liberated (29) and the enemy's strategy of long-range defense was bankrupted. If one looked at a combat map toward the end of April one could have easily seen the extremely favorable strategic position we had created before launching the campaign to liberate Saigon. A vast liberated extended from the southernmost part of Trung Bo and through Military Region 5 and the Central Highlands, and to Tri Thien, where it connected with the great rear area in the North. Thus the entire nation had advanced as far as the land of the Bronze Bastion, had moved close to Saigon-Gia Dinh, and was orienting all actions toward the final strategic battle on the key battlefield: Saigon.

Of the continuous news of victories flooding General Headquarters during the first weeks of April, we paid special attention to the information we received on 8 April. The pilot Nguyen Thanh Trung (30), piloting a F5E aircraft of the puppet air force, had bombed "Independence Palace" then had flown to the liberated area and landed at Phuoc Long. We also learned that naval troops, coordinating with the armed forces of Military Region 5, had liberated the islands of the Spratley Archipelago, beginning with southwest Cay.(31)

Northeast of Saigon, in accordance with the previous plan of COSVN, 4th Corps began the Xuan Loc battle during the night of 9 April. We learned that the enemy had recently reinforced that area and, because our preparations were not yet complete we encountered difficulties and could not yet fight a strong, overwhelming battle. Beginning on the 12th, in addition to making additional preparations we changed over to surrounding Xuan Loc and wiped out reinforcements on the outer perimeter. We inflicted heavy casualties on the puppet 18th Division and airborne brigade, took Dau Giay, took the intersection of routes 1 and 20, isolated Xuan Loc, and to the west threatened the Bien Hoa-Ho Nai defense line. In view of that situation, and because after Phan Rang our pressure to the east became increasingly strong, the enemy were forced to abandon Xuan Loc (during the night of 20 April). The enemy's defense line east of Saigon had been penetrated and our staging area in that direction had been expanded. We had additional new favorable conditions before beginning the campaign to liberate Saigon.

In addition to closely monitoring, and providing operational guidance to, the coastal column in southernmost Nam Bo, the General Staff was concerned with monitoring preparations by our political forces in Saigon and the Mekong Delta, in order to prepare to coordinate with the attacks by main-force troops in the final strategic war-deciding battle.

During the briefing, although there was not much information about preparations for mass uprisings, we assigned to the Operations Department and the Militia Department the task of continually reporting on preparations for mass uprisings in the key theater, especially after the discovery of new factors regarding that mode during the campaign to liberate Da Nang.

On 17 April the General Staff sent a message to the B2 staff organ inquiring about the situation vis-a-vis preparing mass forces inside the city, in the surrounding areas, and in the Mekong Delta.

It was learned that on 12 April the standing committee of the Saigon municipal party committee issued a resolution on the political and armed organizations in the city and in the outskirts in order to make urgent preparations for the masses to arise and coordinate with the main-force units once the campaign to liberate Saigon began. About 700 cadres inside the city and 1,000 cadres in the outskirts were prepared to take advantage of the opportunity and mobilize mass uprisings. Nearly 40 "metamorphosed" organizations were consolidated and became our bases in the outskirts and in the city. We had mastered, to one degree or another, 40 political enclaves, and had organized 233 self-defense units in the city and more than 3,000 guerrillas in the outskirts. Those were not large forces but they would be very important in combining attacks with uprisings in the final war-deciding battle that was to come. In the Mekong Delta, after the issuance of COSVN Resolution 15 (32) the localities in Military Region 9 recruited thousands of new troops to supplement the provincial and district forces. The provinces had increased the number of local battalions from 15 to 24, upgraded district companies to battalions, and organized 60 additional companies. The militia and guerrilla forces of Military Region 9 rapidly increased from 32,900 (March 1975) to 54,900 (April 1975). In Military Region 8, because of the troops recruitment results and the upgrading of 2,440 guerrillas, added to the

1,200 guerrillas brought in from remote areas, the military region was able to set up seven local battalions, 36 local companies, and 150 local platoons. Ben Tre province increased the number of local battalions from three to five, each district had one or two companies, and each village had one or two guerrilla platoons. It was estimated that the number of people who could be sent into the cities (when there was a general uprising order) would amount to about 10,000, organized into companies and battalions and with tight leadership, in addition to the thousands of families of puppet soldiers who were participating in military proselytization. My Tho Province recruited nearly 1,000 new troops, formed thousands of guerrillas into three new provincial battalions, set up 28 additional district companies, and added 1,500 village guerrillas, about 100 of whom were secret urban guerrillas. It mobilized about 40,000 people to transport weapons for the troops and 4,000 people to sabotage Route 4 at night, and set up obstacles on the Cho Gao Canal.(33) The provinces of Long An, Kien Tuong, Sa Dec, etc., also made all-out efforts to develop their armed forces, so they had the necessary forces to carry out uprisings combined with attacks when the opportunity arose.

Around mid-April the General Staff made a summary report on situation of the development of political and armed forces in the outskirts of Saigon and in the Mekong Delta. The Political Bureau and the Military Commission were very pleased when they learned that the capability for mass uprisings in the B2 theater were potentially greater than what occurred during the attack on Da Nang. The model of attacks and uprisings which the Political Bureau stressed during its meeting on 25 March could become a reality.

In addition to monitoring and guiding the fighting to set the stage for the final test of strength on the key battlefield, the General Staff concentrated on guiding the deployment of troops and technical materiel to the B2 theater with a spirit of "miraculous speed and even greater miraculous speed," which the Political Bureau set forth in its meetings at the end of March.

The matter of preparing forces and deploying them to the Saigon front was posed at an early date, while the campaign to liberate Hue and Da Nang was taking place urgently. Toward the end of March, especially after the Political Bureau meeting of 31 March, a matter of concern for General Headquarters and the leaders and commanders on Route 559 and the southern battlefields was that no matter what the situation we could not let the deployment of forces prevent us from taking advantage of the strategic opportunity.

A group of staff and rear services cadres was sent to assist comrade Phung The Tai, deputy chief of staff, who was responsible for troop movements on the 559 route. Implementing the slogan, "miraculous speed and even greater miraculous speed," the activities of the strategic supply apparatus had an increasingly greater tempo.

[5 May 86]

[Text] At the staff and rear services organs on the 559 route and in the B2 theater, the leadership cadres concentrated on monitoring the progress of 1st Corps, which had set out from a location south of the Bac Bo delta; of the B3

forces, which were coming in many directions from the Central Highlands theater; of the 320B division, which had set out from Tri Thien; of the 3rd Division, which was coming from Binh Dinh; of the 325th and 304th divisions, which were coming from Da Nang, etc. The staff and strategic rear services organs were especially concerned with monitoring the transporting of large-caliber shells, especially for tanks. They mobilized, supervised, and encouraged the units to compete against time, the weather, and the enemy troops. Complete victory had to be won before the onset of the rainy season. In March the Political Bureau had affirmed that it would be criminal to miss the strategic opportunity. Miraculous speed, boldness, surprise, and certain victory were combat orders and an action slogan for transforming that determination into victory. At that time, surprise and certain victory depended primarily on time. It was necessary to ensure that time, which had always been on our side, would be increasingly in our favor.

As stated in the previous chapter, the urgent concentration of forces to surround and divide the enemy troops on the key battlefield had been decided upon by the Political Bureau in its meetings at the end of March. That policy was relayed to the leadership and command echelons in the Central Highlands, Military Region 5, and Nam Bo theaters.

On the routes east and west of the Truong Son, all units which were on the move received orders to increase their speed as much as possible. At the end of March the Central Highlands command had been directed to oversee and assist the 341st and 316th divisions, and the other divisions in the Central Highlands, to "arrive with all units as soon as soon as possible."

At the end of March 1st Corps, commanded by Nguyen Hoa, with Hoang Thi serving as the political officer, and with two divisions and technical units, had been ordered to set out. The 308th Division selected to remain behind to defend the great rear area. The requirement that was posed for the corps was to move with great urgency so that by about 10 April the first units could reach the Dong Xoai area. The Genral Staff had to urgently reinforce the corps before it set out because during the last months of 1974 and the first part of 1975 a ratr large number of forces had been withdrawn from that corps to meet the urgent needs of the battlefield during that period. We relayed the message from Van to Tho informing him of the progress of 1st Corps, for while en route to the B2 theater Tho had sent a message to Ba and Van had requested that 1st Corps set out early.

Although the coastal comun, commanded by Tan, had to increase its speed and attack while on the move, in mid-April, after the Phan Rang victory, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission, as well as our comrades in the B2 theater, were continually asking when the first units of that column would reach Ba Ria. They were waiting until we put pressure on the Bien Hoa-Ho Nai defense line, and for our forces to cut Route 15 and the Long Tau River so that we could, in addition to liberating Xuan Loc, surround Saigon from the east and southeast. Between 16 and 20 April one message after another was sent urging the coastal column to further increase its speed and enquiring about the material requirements that had to be met to ensure miraculously rapid troop mevement.

Not only Group 559 (34), but also the Military Region 5 Command, were directed to lend assistance in all regards, especially with regard to food, transportation facilities, and POL, so that the eastern column could reach the key battlefield early.

In April the entire army rushing toward the key battlefield. The units from the North, Tri Thien, the Central Highlands, and Military Region 5 had set out en masse. They had departed from different locations and at different time, and were following many different routes and traveling by means of different facilities, but they were moving with "miraculous speed and even greater miraculous speed." Some units had to fight their way through and some outran their supply lines. Closely monitoring and firmly grasping the progress of the units which were racing toward the key battlefield, were for the staff organ during that period among its most important responsibilities. The two strategic routes east west of the Truong Son had been expanded and extended. Furthermore, we now had routes 14 and 1. Clearly, in comparison to the past we had many advantages in moving troops from all directions toward the key battlefield. But a considerable difficulty was that there were insufficient motor vehicles to meet the requirements, even though the Ministry of National Defense had been authorized to mobilize all facilities that could be mobilized in the rear area and had fully utilized vehicles captured from the enemy, and even mobilized civilian vehicles in the newly liberated areas. In addition to the very large numbers of troops who had to be moved quickly, there were thousands and tens of thousands of party, government, and Fatherland Front cadres who also had been sent south with "miraculous speed" so that they could quickly participate in consolidating the newly liberated areas and expand them. Those numbers exceeded all expectation of the sectors and echelons.

During the briefings during the last days of April, the General Staff was especially concerned was the progress being made by each unit in moving to the assembly areas around the key battlefield. The operations duty officers always had to be prepared to answer such questions as "Why is unit A moving so slowly" "When will unit B arrive?" "When will unit C arrive at X?"

During the extremely seething days of the revolutionary war and the flood of news about the victories, not only General Headquarters, but also every village, neighborhood, family, and person in the great rear area in the North, closely followed the progress of the troops in their southward advance toward Saigon. The entire nation had gone to war and the entire nation was following each step of the army as it fought battles, won victories, and liberated territory. Before setting out, many soldiers promised their families and friends that they would write them letters immediately after setting foot in liberated Saigon. That dream of the soldiers was very legitimate and that was simply the way it was. However, I would like to linger a while at this point to say something that must be said.

Some of the hundreds of thousands of troops who enthusiastically set out for the front were ordered to remain behind along the way. The liberated areas had been expanded greatly and as new areas were liberated they had to be consolidated immediately. Thus some cadres and men were not able to continue the advance south toward Saigon with their comrades. Some soldiers stopped along the coast of central Vietnam, with its sand dunes and sea waves, while

others remained behind in the southern and northern Central Highlands, with their high mountains and vast jungles.

The scenery, climate, languages, etc., of those areas differed, but love between the troops and the people was a feeling shared by the entire nation. Living amidst the love and care of the people in the areas we had just captured from the enemy, our troops gradually became accustomed to their mission of proselytizing and organizing the masses and consolidating the accomplishments of the revolution, a very new mission for the new troops. They had to become accustomed to the local customs and study the languages of the local people, so that they could, along with the cadres of the sectors and the people, build and stabilize a new life, rebuild schools and clinics, improve the roads, develop production, consolidate the mass organizations, etc. Those tasks were truly varied and complicated, and had to be carried out very actively and urgently to rapidly consolidate the liberated area into a direct rear area for the key battlefield.

Relying on the people, and with the all-out assistance of the people, who ardently supported the revolution and the new regime, the "troops of Uncle Ho" overcame all problems and carried out all tasks, above all they encouraged the people to track down the FULRO remnants (35). Those remnants were deceived and dominated by their leaders and refused to lay down their arms, but continued to surreptitiously sabotage the new life in their newly liberated hamlets and villages. Combat to wipe up the FULRO remnants was completely different from the face-to-face battles with the U.S.-puppet troops in which the young soldiers had participated. Some battles require more brain power than firepower. Mobilizing the people and working with them to wipe out and disintegrate FULRO, and appeal for its members to surrender, was for the young troops a mission that required patience, intelligence, and courage. They also understood that that mission could not be fulfilled in a single day and they had voluntarily become part of that mission and have the noble nature of revolutionaries, whom Uncle Ho taught to be "loyal to the party, filial toward the people, and prepared to fight and sacrifice for the independence and freedom of the Fatherland and for socialism, fulfilling all missions and defeating all enemies."

Every feat of arms, even if not a resounding victory, was very important with regard to defending and consolidating the newly liberated areas and promptly mobilizing manpower and materiel for the final war-deciding battle. They felt that they were marching together with the powerful units which were advancing rapidly southward, in the direction of Saigon.

In addition to monitoring the progress of the units rushing southward, another problem with which the General Staff was concerned during mid-April was artillery shells for the campaign to liberate Saigon, especially tank shells.

On 22 April, Dung sent a message from eastern Nam Bo informing us that during the past several days artillery shells had begun to arrive from Group 559. He had ordered that an inventory be taken and found that the number of artillery shells was insufficient, enough for only one basic load. Although the other kinds of artillery shells were also in short supply, there were sufficient

quantities for about three basic loads, which was temporarily acceptable. He requested that about 10,000 tank shells be sent by air to Buon Ma Thuot. The regional rear services forces would receive the shells and take them to the B2 front.

The next day, in a message reporting to the Political Bureau and the Military Commission on planning the beginning of the campaign in the various directions, Dung stated that his staff was concentrating on resolving difficulties regarding artillery shells, shells for tanks, and vehicles for the assault columns so that the campaign could be begun on time.

In fact, we in the north had not yet have precise knowledge of the progress of the convoys transporting the various kinds of supplies to the battlefield, especially those which had been tasked with moving most quickly and being the first to arrive.

On 19 April the General Staff sent a message to the battlefield informing our comrades that 240 trucks of Group 559 transporting 13,000 130mm shells had left on 17 April, along with 40 trucks transporting tank spare parts and 150 other vehicles of the Rear Services General Department. From supply depots all over the North, 160mm mortar shells had been mobilized to be sent south, and were also on the way.

In that day's message we recommended that Dung inform us of his specific needs, in order of priority, because there was a great shortage of transportation facilities, while the number of troops and technical military equipment being transported was very great. If the order of priority was not specifically stipulated in order to readjust the transportation facilities in a timely manner, the operational plan could be affected.

On 22 April, after receiving a message from Dung on the need for tank shells, the General Staff and the Rear Services General Department made a survey and replied immediately that they not be worried: 8,300 shells had been sent by truck; 2,300 shells would reach Dong Xoai on 26 April and the remaining 6,000 would arrive on 28 April, and 2,944 other shells had been sent by sea to Quy Nhon and Nha Trang on 23 and 24 April, which Group 559 had been directed to take to the B2 front. It was estimated that 20,000 additional shells would reach Nha Trang on 1 May. The ships and truck convoys transporting tank shells had been directed to reach the battlefield as quickly as possible.

[6 May 86]

[Text] The staff and rear services organs made calculations and concluded that airplanes could carry only small amounts and in fact would not be any quicker. However, we sent some tank shells to Buon Ma Thuot by air because the regional rear services organ had sent trucks to pick them up.

We had learned that Tan, in eastern Nam Bo, needed about 4,000 each of 130mm artillery shells, 100mm tank shells, D74 shells, and 85mm shells. The General Staff informed Tan that the shells had arrived at Quy Nhon and Nha Trang on 24 April. Dong Si Nguyen was directed by the High Command to deliver them immediately to the eastern column.

Thanh Tuy Ha, a large enemy ammunition dump, was in the path of advance of the eastern column. Many 105mm and 155mm artillery shells were stored there. The sapper and artillery units had been directed destroy supply depots when there was an operational necessity to do so, so that when we captured them our troops could use the captured ammunition immediately in combat. The General Staff reported on that situation so that Tan could refer to it when placing artillery positions at Nho Trach to interdict the Tan Son Nhut airfield, as well as when developing the attack and shelling pre-selected targets in the city.

As the end of April approached, we monitored and supervised the shipment of supplies to the Saigon front with increasingly greater closeness and urgency. Dong Si Nguyen and Phung The Tai continually supervised and informed the traffic control stations on the strategic transportation routes so that they could understand the needs of the battlefield. Cargo was transported in accordance with the following order: 130mm shells, 100mm shells, D74 shells, DKZ 75 shells, DKZ 82 shells, 120mm mortar shells, 85mm and 122mm artillery shells, and POL, especially secondary POL products.

More than 15,000 tons of weapons (including war booty) were brought south from the Central Highlands. The leadership comrades of the military regions, from Tri Thien to Military Region 5 and Military Region 6, were concerned with overseeing the urgent shipment of large-caliber shells to the key battlefield. All transportation facilities that could be mobilized were concentrated to rapidly transport ammunition south from Cam Lo (Tri Thien). The main roads-- routes 1, 19, and 14--and the sea were fully utilized to quickly ship cargo to Quy Nhon and Nha Trang.

The entire transportation apparatus was continually in motion, for the North to the South, and on all roads, was focused in one direction: the key Saigon battlefield. Mixed in among the gigantic formations of tens of thousands of trucks extending thousands of kilometers were two vehicles carrying maps, which departed Hanoi on 10 April. An event of the Dien Bien Phu period was repeated: "operational" maps were urgently sent to the battlefield so that they could arrive in time for the beginning of the campaign. The General Staff sent messages to inform the front staff organ could monitor the progress of the two special vehicles. In fact, on 14 April we sent a message to Le Ngoc Hien informing him that we did not know the location of the two vehicles. When the vehicles left we only instructed the drivers that at each new location they should have the radio station to send a message south to keep our comrades there informed. The vehicles carrying the maps had to reach Dong Xoai by 20 April.

Another important matter being studied by the General Staff, so that it could make recommendations to the Military Commission, was the fighting methods to be used in the campaign to liberate Saigon.

On 12 April, after being supplemented by a number of cadres, the Central Team (36) met to carry out that task.

Nguyen Van Xuyen, deputy commander of the B2 front, and Tran Hai Phung,

formerly commander of the Saigon Front, who were resisting in the North, contributed actively to the team's research. As people who were long active in the South, contributed many specific, active opinions.

The Xuan Loc was still being fought. The mission posed for the team was to, on the specific situation with regard to the situation of the enemy and ourselves, study and recommend operational plans according to two contingencies:

1. The campaign to liberate Saigon taking place quickly.
2. The campaign having to be prolonged into the rainy season.

On 13 April, the team listened to a report on the situation of the enemy in Saigon and its outskirts presented by Tran Hai Phung. He was quite familiar with the final lair of the puppets. That report helped the team and enabled all of us to have detailed understanding of the enemy, from their forces and defensive deployments to the construction of the important public buildings that would be our primary objectives in each direction.

Then the Central Team drafted an operational plan and enthusiastically debated several opinions that had been expressed:

Determination to quickly surround and divide the enemy at both the strategic and campaign levels.

The capability to annihilate the enemy on the outer perimeter so that they could not form an enclave in the city.

The key battle--annihilating the enemy's mobile forces.

Interdicting the Long Tau River and the Cho Gao canal, and the Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhat airfields.

Using enemy aircraft to attack objectives on the mainland and preventing the enemy from fleeing by sea or to islands.

On 16 April, after summarizing the opinions expressed, Khan reported to the standing committee of the Military Commission. Additional opinions were expressed for further study:

The possibility that the enemy would collapse. Would the final strategic war-deciding battle follow the same course as those in the Central Highlands and at Da Nang?

How would the enemy react when they discovered our forces around Saigon, especially to the east? What would be the operational capabilities of the enemy air force once Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhat were heavily shelled?

How should we take advantage of the opportunity when the United States gave up or replaced Thieu?

What should be our method of breaching the outer defensive perimeter, move close to the center of the city, and put the enemy in a situation of rapid disintegration and rapid surrender?

What should our operational plan be during the rainy season, if we could not win a quick victory?

We received much additional information which helped us study and reach conclusions. Ford's declaration showed that the United States would have to give up and Thieu's strategic reserve forces had been used up. The enemy air force still had three divisions but their operational capability would be greatly limited if the Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nhut airfields were heavily shelled.

On 17 April, Khanh and I joined them in discussions. That was the team's final discussion session. The latest information was posted on a wall map of Nam Bo. After looking at the map, the members of the team quickly reached agreement about the enemy's deployment in each direction. The enemy were strong to the east and west-northwest. They were weaker to the west and south-west. The enemy's outer perimeter was strong but they were weaker in the city proper. The enemy's Military Region IV was vulnerable because their regular units had been sent to defend Can Tho and were scattered out among the large cities and along Route 4. The rural areas were defended only by regional forces. That afforded an opportunity for the masses to arise and liberate themselves by combining attacks with uprisings.

At the end of the discussion period we reached agreement on recommending some results of the team's study to the standing committee of the Military Commission.

1. With regard to the enemy's deployment, an outstanding characteristic of the defensive deployment of the puppet troops was that the outer perimeter was strong and there was little inside it. They had sent all of their regular forces to the outer perimeter in hopes of coping up our main-force units. But on the outer perimeter the enemy were under pressure and were surrounded in all directions. Within it, the enemy's defensive deployment was to tie in the outskirts with the inner city. But the inner city was within the range of our artillery and we had secret forces which were ready to act. We were capable of coordinating attacks from within with attacks from without. If the enemy's regular forces were annihilated and routed, and if the masses arose within the city, the enemy would be panicked, as happened at Da Nang. The United States would withdraw and abandon the puppets. We were capable of rapidly mastering the city.

2. With regard to determining the direction of attack, the northeast was the principal direction. The northern (Binh Duong) and western directions were very important. The southeast was a direction for surprise deep penetration, and the south was a very strategic direction.

3. With regard to fighting methods, we would combine attacks with uprisings, attack from outside with strong assault forces, coordinate with the forces inside the city, and combine many columns, with selected emphasis. First of

all, we would surround, divide, annihilate and shatter the enemy's defensive clusters on the exterior, and not allow them to form an enclave around the city in the inner city. If we did not attack the outer defensive perimeter skilfully, combat in the outskirts and in the inner city would be difficult and prolonged.

4. A number of specific problems had to be resolved in order to carry out those fighting methods:

Supervising movement by the column to the assembly positions (with all-out efforts being made to ensure that all arrived between 20 and 23 April), so that we could begin the campaign on time, especially to the north, the northwest, and the southwest.

The eastern column would take Ba Ria, develop its attack down to Vung Tau, take Long Thanh, develop its attack to Nhon Trach, set up artillery positions there, and shell Tan Son Nhat airfield.

On 4th Corps was prepared to fight enemy troops withdrawing from Xuan Loc, and to annihilate and route the puppet 18th Division.

Group 232 would continue to cut Route 4 along the key segments, according to plan.

From all directions our troops would rapidly approach the objectives and shell Bien Hoa airfield, Tan Son Nhat airfield, and the puppet Joint General Staff. Military Region 9 would coordinate by interdicting the Can Tho airfield and preventing the enemy from using it to reinforce Saigon.

Meticulous preparations would be made to surround and divide the enemy, create favorable conditions for annihilating and routing the enemy main-force units on the outer perimeter and the intermediate perimeters, thus preventing the enemy from having time to form an enclave. In the intermediate areas (Cu Chi, Trang Bang, Ben Cat, and Lai Thieu), when the main-force troops attacks we would mobilize mass uprisings to win the right of mastership and extend them to the north and north-west.

In the course of the attacks by our main-force troops, the sappers had to take and hold bridges to create conditions for the columns rapidly penetrating into the city. We were especially concerned with taking and holding the Moi, Ghenh, Dong Nai River, Rach Chiec, Saigon River, Binh Phuoc, Binh Loi, and Binh Trieu bridges to the northeast and east, and the Bong and Xang bridges to the north and northwest.

The assault columns in the directions with mechanized infantry, taking full advantage of enemy vulnerabilities, would rapidly penetrate into the inner city. The secret armed units inside the city, organized into small teams, would step up sabotage activities in the enemy's rear, combined with proselytizing activities by the families of soldiers, to create a confused atmosphere and cause many of the enemy to desert.

5. If the campaign extended into the rainy season, we would continue to

attack. We had to do a good job of carrying out the following preparatory tasks:

Stepping up the political-ideological work to maintain our determination to fight continually.

Preparing supplementary and replacement forces, with emphasis on rainy season combat under the terrain conditions of the Saigon area and western Nam Bo.

Defending the strategic and campaign transportation routes to prevent the enemy from carrying out sabotage, and overcoming rainy season weather.

Strengthening forces to step up attacks and uprisings in the Mekong Delta, coordinated continually and effectively with the primary area: Saigon.

Studying the specific problems regarding rainy season combat, with regard to the scale of forces in each direction, etc.

After additions and adjustments were made, on 18 April the General Staff completed a report to the Supreme Commander. With Van's agreement, Khanh sent people to brief the front's operational staff organ.

[8 May 86]

[Text] I reminded them that those were initial opinions which could be researched and applied by our comrades in the South. Some things may have been appropriate, while other things may have been inappropriate. If necessary, the staff organ in the South could make additional recommendations so that we could work together in further studies.

In addition to further studying the mass uprising capability and mode, we reminded the members of the team to closely monitor the defensive measures of the enemy and the reactions of the Americans, in order to promptly inform the battlefield. War is an extremely complex military-political-social phenomenon which continually changes and always has many capabilities for development from the beginning to the end. The strategic staff organ must always make calculations in all regards and be on guard against all contingencies, including both the most favorable circumstances and the most difficult circumstances, so that we can take the initiative no matter what the situation.

After we changed our fighting method at Xuan Loc, the General Staff received information that the enemy were readjusting their formations and forming an enclave to defend against us. They were trying to keep Route 4 open between Saigon and Can Tho. We predicted that if the enemy learned that our 2nd Corps was advancing toward Ba Ria and Vung Tau they would have to increase their forces to defend their withdrawal route in that direction. Therefore, the eastern column had to step up its rate of advance even more.

We had shelled Bien Hoa airfield with 130mm artillery only twice, but the enemy were very perplexed. Clearly, if the Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhut, and Can Tho airfields were heavily shelled and completely paralyzed, the morale and

combat ability of the enemy would decline even more rapidly.

We received information that the U.S. embassy and the other foreign embassies were preparing to flee Saigon between 18 and 20 April 1975. We predicted that during that time the situation in Saigon would be very confused, and even chaotic. But it was still necessary to monitor the intentions of the United States, Ford, and Kissinger, and the possibility that they may use the evacuation as an excuse to recommend that the U.S. Congress provide military aid for the puppets disguised as "humanitarian aid."

But the enemy's circumstances were still very perilous. Even in Saigon they had few mobile forces left, only two understrength airborne brigades. They had had to send many airplanes from Bien Hoa to Tan Son Nhat and Can Tho. The enemy's troop deployments were very confused. Meanwhile, on 15 April the United States hurriedly evacuated Phnom Penh after deciding to abandon their puppet Lon Nol and Cambodia.

Those things allowed us to think about the political changes that might occur in the very center of Saigon. They also demanded that we complete our preparatory work at a more urgent pace, and be prepared to act immediately once the opportunity arose.

On 20 April it was confirmed that the United States had begun to evacuate Saigon. That night the enemy abandoned Xuan Loc. The next day, 21 April, Thieu resigned and the evacuation of people from Bien Hoa began.

Additional messages were sent to urge the units to accelerate their rate of advance, especially the eastern column. We were awaiting news that the eastern column had taken Ba Ria-Vung Tau, cut the enemy's line of retreat, used artillery to block the Long Tau River, and were prepared to attack Bien Hoa in accordance with the common plan.

After the Political Bureau briefing on the morning of 22 April, a Political Bureau message signed by Ba was urgently sent to our comrades on the battlefield. The message informed them that the enemy had abandoned Xuan Loc and that Thieu had resigned, then affirmed that that situation was causing much consternation within the ranks of the puppets. The people's movement could undergo new development. The U.S.-puppets, seeking ways to delay our offensive against Saigon, set up a new government and made a proposal to us (via the Laos government) with regard to a ceasefire, in hopes of reaching a political settlement, save themselves from a perilous situation, and avoid total defeat. The military and political opportunity for launching the general offensive against Saigon was ripe. We had to take advantage of each day and each hour in order to launch the attacks against the enemy from all directions on time, and must not slow down. Timely action at that time was the best guarantee of winning total victory.

The Political Bureau emphasized that "You should immediately order all units to act promptly, and stress combining military attacks with mass uprisings. Coordination among the various directions and between attacks and uprisings will be implemented in the course of action."

On the same day, 22 April, after the Political Bureau message was sent a message was sent by the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee which clarified a number of points that had been discussed by the standing committee of the Military Commission and during the recent meeting of the Political Bureau.

After mentioning the predictions regarding the enemy's defensive schemes in the two remaining strategic areas--Saigon-Gia Dinh and the Mekong Delta--the message affirmed that the strategic opportunity had arrived, and that it was necessary to promptly carry out the general offensive and uprisings, and make good use of each day and hour to win one victory after another. The Military Commission of the Party Central Committee also expressed a number of opinions about the characteristics of the enemy's situation and our situation, and the missions and requirements of each column. The common mission was to take the initiative and make good use of time to annihilate the enemy, move up close to the objectives, and be prepared to develop the attack into the city from the direction in which the enemy were most vulnerable and was most favorable for us. Our sapper and commando forces inside the city had to take in a timely manner the important, key objectives that had been selected in advance. It was necessary to firmly grasp the political and military situation and guide the masses in arising at the right time. To the southwest and along Route 4 we had to have a specific guidance plan to help the units overcome difficulties and fulfill the following specific missions:

The units with the mission of attacking into the city had to firmly grasp the situation and positively create all conditions in order to be prepared to attack into the city.

It was necessary to concentrate forces and select a relatively favorable segment of Route 4, from Tan An to Cai Lay, along which our troops could annihilate a number of enemy positions, carry out a strategic interdiction, gain firm control, and force the enemy to react, while also being prepared to annihilate the enemy when they withdrew troops from Saigon to Can Tho.

The General Staff continued to monitor and study the enemy's defensive measures in order to make recommendations to supplement our fighting methods.

We had paid attention to the statements made by Lt. Gen. Nguyen Vinh Nghi, who was captured on 16 April at Phan Rang. The Intelligence Department had obtained from him rather important information. We sent messages concerning the principal contents of the interrogation of Nguyen Vinh Nghi relevant to the fighting methods we were about to employ, and also sent someone with a tape recording of the interrogation to the battlefield so that our comrades could study it.

Nguyen Van Linh did not have detailed knowledge about all of our forces in the various directions, but only our forces in the B2 theater. According to him, the puppet General Staff estimated that we could attack Saigon from two directions: along Route 1 from the north, then from the east, and along Route 13 from the north-northeast.

The enemy were defending Saigon by the method of defense at a distance, along

an arc extending from Go Dau Ha to Lai Khe, Bien Hoa, and Xuan Loc. They had deployed a division in each direction. If Saigon were attacked, the enemy would withdraw three Military Region IV divisions to Can Tho: one division would defend the airfield at a radius of 12 kilometers; one division would defend a line along Route 4 from Vinh Long to Cai Lay; and one division would defend a line from Cai Lay to Tan An. The enemy felt that only by defending that road could they defend Saigon and, vice versa, only by defending Saigon could they defend Military Region 4.

According to Nguyen Vinh Nghi, the enemy did not intend to abandon Saigon and withdraw to Military Region 4 because that region had not been made ready with regard to supply and rear services bases.

Nghi declared that within Saigon the enemy's principal forces were the police the key installations in the city, there was no organized defense. He believed that we should not attack Saigon directly, but needed only take the airfields and annihilate the defensive forces on the outer perimeter to bring about the collapse of the enemy in Saigon. If we did attack the city directly, we needed to focus on the Tan Son Nhat airfield, the Joint General Staff, and the airborne troops at the Hoang Hoa Tham camp.

In Nguyen Vinh Nghi's view, the most effective course would be to attack from Go Dau Ha-Trang Bang. To the east, the enemy were capable of destroying the important bridges to halt our advance.

With regard to supply depots, Nghi believed that the principal depots were those at Nha Be and Cat Lai. Cat Lai was at that time the enemy's principal ammunition supply depot. Long Binh was only a quartermaster supply depot, so attacking it would have little effect.

The enemy were relying primarily on their air force, for their defensive forces had been stretched out and they had few reserve forces. Therefore, it was extremely important for them to defend the Bien Hoa, Tan Son Nhat, and Can Tho airfields. The Bien Hoa airfield played an especially important role. That is where the F.5 and A.37 aircraft were repaired. The Tan Son Nhat and Can Tho airfields did not have the technical equipment to repair such aircraft. The enemy had just dispersed a number of F.5 and A.37 aircraft, but most of them were still in revetments at Bien Hoa airfield.

Nguyen Vinh Nghi reflected his knowledge and thoughts. But because he could not understand the nature and military art of our revolutionary army, it is clear that his opinions could not be appropriate to our fighting methods.

During the last days of April the staff organ was recapitulating the situation and preparing for the Political Bureau meeting on the 26th, on 25 April a message was received from Tho to Ba. The message, which was 10 typewritten pages long, discussed all aspects of the situation in the B2 theater during the past several weeks. It enabled us to understand more clearly and accurately the situation, with regard to both ourselves and the enemy from the beginning of the Xuan Loc battle to the present, just prior to the beginning of the final war-deciding battle.

Tho agreed with the conclusion of the Political Bureau during its 22 April meeting, that the opportunity was ripe and we had to make good use of every hour in order to launch the offensive against the enemy's final lair. If it were delayed, the political-diplomatic situation would become more complicated, and the first rain storms of the rainy season were about to begin. But he also informed us that because of specific difficulties we could not launch the offensive immediately.

First of all, there was the situation regarding the movement of our units to the assembly areas. By about 24 April, nearly all of the 10 divisions sent to the battlefield had arrived, were stabilizing their organization and living conditions, and studying the battlefield, a battlefield (especially the inner city) with which many of our command cadres were not familiar. All of the units felt that they were very short on time.

With regard to rear services, because the number of units had increased greatly, the battlefield was far away, and there was a shortage of transportation facilities, both the central and battlefield rear-area services continued to experience many difficulties with regard to ammunition.

Although we had agreed not to be perfectionist, and to simultaneously fight and build, it was also necessary to ensure the minimum conditions for beginning the campaign and winning a smashing victory.

The enemy had not yet figured out our fighting method. Would we surround and annihilate them on the outer perimeter, move in gradually and only then launch an assault on the city, or strike directly into the city?

[9 May 86]

[Text] At that time, the enemy's method of deployment was to stop us from afar, especially to the north and northwest. The enemy had a plan to destroy bridges if they concluded that they could not be defended. One of the main worries of our troops at that time was that if the enemy destroyed the bridges that would create a major obstacle for the advance of our technical combat arms. We had a plan to take and defend the bridges and also plans to build other bridges or to fight without tanks and artillery if they could not cross the rivers.

Le Duc Tho also referred to the plan to combine attacks with uprisings and preparations to carry out that combination. They had reviewed and contributed opinions about the plans of the military regions and provinces. Vo Van Kiet had gone to the delta to supervise that undertaking. Our comrades in the South also believed that when we attacked the key objectives in Saigon and the enemy were defeated, their forces in the Mekong Delta would fall apart and the localities would have conditions for arising.

On the key Saigon front, our comrades predicted that the enemy could form an enclave to the north and northwest, closer to Saigon, and discussed with the corps how the enemy should be fought if they formed an enclave.

Tho's message also informed us why the regional troops could not carry out the

COSVN policy of taking advantage of the favorable opportunity at the end of March, of not waiting for the main-force units to arrive, but to take the initiative in undertaking activities at Xuan Loc, along Route 4, and the area just to the southwest of Saigon. The reasons were that their organization and fighting methods were not good, their forces were insufficient, rear services were difficult because of the long distances, etc.

Returning to the extremely urgent preparations that were being made for the key Saigon battlefield, Tho's message avowed that "You may be at ease. We are taking full advantage of every day and every hour, and within a few more days, after some basic deficiencies have been overcome, we will begin the campaign as planned."

The message was read at a meeting of the Political Bureau on 26 April. That conference agreed with the conclusions and stands of the leadership cadres on the battlefield. Analyzing the political situation in Saigon, the Political Bureau foresaw that the United States might install Duong Van Minh, so it decided to issue a declaration of the PRG of South Vietnam in order to take the political initiative. After the meeting, the Political Bureau immediately sent a message to the Political Bureau which emphasized, "The Political Bureau is of the opinion that we must act very boldly, urgently, and promptly, especially in the present situation."

On the basis of the newest information, and having received Tho's message, the General Staff reviewed all of the preparatory tasks for the campaign to liberate Saigon. With a brief period of time the entire nation had gone all-out to prepare for the key battlefield, with a spirit of "miraculous speed and even greater miraculous speed."

On the battlefield, in combat to set the stage for the campaign to liberate Saigon, our troops had mauled the main part of the enemy forces, taken the Xuan Loc and Long Khanh areas, and pulled additional forces of the puppet's II Corps to the east, thus creating openings to the northwest and southwest. To the southwest we had moved up to Route 4, sent forces to occupy the Nam Long An area, and created an advantageous position to the south from which to break through into Saigon. The forces in the outskirts stood their ground. We had achieved a transformation in the Mekong Delta battlefield, pinned down enemy forces, and created additional favorable conditions for the main battlefield--Saigon.

The strategic mobile units, totaling nearly 10 infantry divisions and technical combat arms units, had raced against time in moving down from the North and central Vietnam, and had moved with "miraculous speed" to the battlefield. The eastern column had overcome all difficulties, fighting as it went, and, along with the units in the other directions reached the assembly locations by the stipulated deadlines and formed fists with overwhelming strength in each direction before the campaign began.

The strategic rear services and regional rear services, under the direct guidance of Dinh Duc Thien and Bui Phung, rectified their organization, adjusted their forces, and formed five groups which were responsible for combat support in the five directions. The campaign supply routes, with a

total length of nearly 1,800 kilometers, were consolidated and expanded and converged on the columns' assembly points. All transportation facilities had been mobilized, along with more than 63,000 civilian front-line laborers materiel and served the mobility of the combat forces. By the designated day (25 April 1975) all preparatory tasks to provide material-technical support for the campaign had been completed. With 100,000 tons of supplies of all kinds which had just been transported from the great rear area, and more than 60,000 tons that had been stockpiled in advance, the volume of preparatory materiel had exceeded the requirements of the campaign plan. Some of those supplies were stockpiled for the eventuality that the fighting would extend into the rainy season.

Thus by that time, the morning of 26 April, all preparatory tasks on the main battlefield had been completed. The eastern column was to be the first to open fire. The units in all directions were prepared to enter into the final strategic war-deciding battle for 20 years of the anti-U.S. resistance war for national salvation and of the entire 30 years of the national liberation war, with the greatest strength and the strongest spirit.

Chapter Seven

The Final War-Deciding Battle

After the briefing on the morning of 27 April we held a cadre conference in the conference room of the Operations Department. In addition to the staff cadres responsible for helping the Military Commission monitor the campaign, we invited representatives of the general departments. Everyone was present. Perhaps no one was thinking that that day was Sunday. Everyone's joyful features revealed the worrying they had done while preparing for the recent campaign. The troops in all directions were ready. During the afternoon of the previous day the eastern column had opened fire. The eastern column's line of approach to the inner city was farther than those of the other directions. The Military Commission had accepted the recommendation of Tan and the campaign command to allow the troops in that direction to begin the campaign early.

After discussing the matter, Khanh and I saw that it was necessary to disseminate matters relevant to the campaign which had to be grasped so that they could monitor the situation and assist the upper echelon in its guidance.

Beginning the meeting, Khanh officially announced that on 13 April the campaign command, responding to the aspirations of cadres and men on the battlefield, sent a message recommending that the Political Bureau allow it to name the campaign to liberate Saigon the "Ho Chi Minh Campaign." On the following day General Secretary Le Duan, on behalf of the Political Bureau, sent a message in reply agreeing to that recommendation. As soon as Khanh had finished speaking those in attendance applauded. Everyone's faces became much brighter.

More than 60 years previously, Saigon had been the place from which Ho Chi Minh had left his homeland to search for ways to save his people and his country. Saigon had also had the honor of bearing the name "Ho Chi Minh City" from the beginning of the anti-French resistance war. Saigon and the South as a whole had led the way throughout the long 30-year resistance war. Now Uncle Ho's name was tied in with an historical event that was about to take place and indicated the great importance of the campaign and the inevitability of its victory. Our soldiers, the nephews of Uncle Ho, who had the honor of participating in the historic campaign bearing his name, would bravely rush forward to smash the enemy's final lair, and win the greatest victory in the briefest time. The applause both expressed confidence in our inevitable victory and honored the troops at the front.

The Intelligence Department briefed us on the latest information concerning the enemy.

The United States' attitude of having to swallow a bitter pill was evident. Only a week previously President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger were still applying pressure and demanding that Congress approve supplementary appropriations for Thieu, now, confronted with the collapse of the Saigon puppet regime, they were forced to "take French leave." One day after Ford issued the order to evacuate (18 April), Kissinger declared at a press conference that "How the political situation in South Vietnam develops is up to the people of South Vietnam. The United States is willing to accept any solution they approve." On the same day, in a letter sent to Thieu Ambassador Martin said, "Nothing can be done to prolong the existence of Saigon for more than a week or two. The city may fall to North Vietnam and the Viet Cong within the next few weeks."

When Thieu ordered the abandonment of Xuan Loc the United States began to carry out its evacuation plan. Three U.S. aircraft carriers were sent to the South China Sea to implement that plan.

After being given the green light by the United States, the puppet generals and opposition groups stepped up their pressure, forced Thieu to resign, and installed Tran Van Huong. But only 2 days later, when news of President Ford's declaration reached Saigon, the Nguyen Ba Can cabinet resigned. On 23 April, in a speech delivered at New Orleans University, Ford said, "The war in South Vietnam is over for the United States. We can no longer help the people of South Vietnam. They must cope with any fate awaiting them."

Beginning on 24 April, many Western embassies in Saigon closed. The international airlines at Tan Son Nhat ceased operations. On 26 April, Tran Van Huong requested the "National Assembly" to turn over powers to Gen. Duong Van Minh so that he could "negotiate with the Front"! On the same day, Thieu fled abroad. The "selected" evacuation of Americans and lackeys was taking place urgently.

There were many indications that France wanted to act as the intermediary in arranging a "settlement" in order to achieve a ceasefire and "negotiations to end the war." Paris sent people to South Vietnam to attempt to contact the PRG.

After listening to a report by the Intelligence Department, and on the basis of the basic views of the Political Bureau, I summarized the situation and reached the following conclusions: 1. After the event of 17 April in Phnom Penh, the United States' attitude of abandoning the Saigon puppet regime was affirmed.

2. The political crisis in Saigon had reached crisis proportions, as predicted by the Political Bureau. 3. It was necessary to closely monitor the intentions of France, and especially China, while the campaign was taking place.

On the basis of the enemy's situation and our situation, as reflected on the combat situation map hung on the wall, Cao Van Khanh discussed all aspects of the situation on the Saigon front before the campaign began.

After being forced to evacuate Xuan Loc the enemy had consolidated their forces and formed three lines to defend Saigon.

1. On the outer perimeter, five puppet divisions defended a line extending from Long An to Tay Ninh and down to Bien Hoa and Long Binh.

2. In the outskirts of Saigon, two airborne brigades and three ranger groups were deployed in four sectors the northern sector, from Hoc Mon and Cau Bong to Tan Son Nhat; the western sector, from Vinh Loc, Chau Hiep, Ba Hom, and south of Binh Chanh; the eastern sector, from Go Vap to Precinct 9; and the southern sector, extending southward from Nha Be.

3. The inner city was organized into five districts defended primarily by the police and civil defense forces.

[12 May 86]

[Text] The characteristic of the enemy's defensive deployment in and around Saigon was that the outer perimeter was strong but the inner perimeter was weak. They had sent their strong divisions and technical military equipment to the outer perimeter in hopes of stopping and pushing back our offensive columns. The airborne and ranger units in the outskirts of Saigon were weak because they had suffered heavy casualties, their organization was make-shift, and their forces had been dispersed to defend in many directions, so they were easily isolated, surrounded, and divided. The over-all picture was that the enemy were suffering heavy casualties and were disintegrating, and their morale and fighting strength had seriously declined. But on the Nam Bo battlefield, and particularly on the Saigon-Gia Dinh front the puppet III Corps and IV Corps had not yet suffered heavy defeats and were thus not yet in a status of chaos and disintegration. They had to be considered capable of obstinately resisting in hopes of holding out until the onset of the rainy season.

For our part, Khanh first of all summarized the formations of the main-force units deployed in the various directions.

To the north-west, the main line of advance, after 25 April 3rd Corps moved its divisions and technical military equipment to the western bank of the Saigon River. To the north, 1st Corps had completed the deployment of its forces south of the Be River. To the east, by noon on 26 April 2nd corps had completely mastered the battlefield. After liberating Xuan Loc, 4th Corps had urgently deployed combat formations north and south of Route 1. To the west and southwest, despite difficulties that were encountered in sending forces to the assembly area, Group 232 (reinforced by the 9th Division, Independent Regiment 16 of the regional forces, and the 6th Division of Military Region 7), had brought the units to the assembly areas.

Khanh then discussed in depth the on-the-spot main-force units participating in the campaign.

With regard to the over-all status of the strategic offensive, since the beginning of April the B2 Command had adjusted its deployment to meet the

immediate operational requirements and to conform with the plan to attack Saigon. With regard to the fighting to set the stage to the south and southwest, the main-force regional troops and troops of Military Region 8 had moved up close to Route 4 and the districts in the outskirts of the city. To the north and northwest we had moved up close to Tan Uyen, Go Dau, and Cu Chi, and to the east we had moved up close to Trang Bom, Ho Nai, and the Nuoc Trong base.

The sapper forces, commandoes, and forces of the Saigon municipal unit stood ready in the outskirts and had moved up close to the objectives which they had been assigned. They included six sapper groups (equal to six regiments), which had remained in the outskirts and operated continually behind enemy lines, four battalions and many commando units in the outskirts, and 60 commando teams operating in the inner city. In addition, there were about 300 armed masses and large mass forces organized and commanded by the commando units; concentrated companies and battalions of the municipal unit and Gia Dinh regiments 1 and 2, deployed northwest of the city, and armed forces units of the eastern Nam Bo provinces which were surrounding the enemy in the areas around Saigon and were prepared to coordinate with the main-force units to liberate their localities.

Hundreds of cadres, including precinct and municipal cadres and hundreds of armed forces members, were in position in the political bases and ready to, along with the party organizations, guide the Youth Union and the other mass organizations, and were preparing to lead the masses in and around the city to arise and coordinate when the main-force units attacked.

The deployments of our armed forces in and around Saigon surrounded and isolated Saigon, divided the enemy forces on the inside and the outside, and were ready to coordinate with the mobile forces penetrating into the city. Those deployments resulted from the over-all status of the strategic offensive. Those deployments of our armed forces were also sources of support for the masses, who were prepared to arise.

In brief, our forces were in a position to overwhelm the enemy. We had strong main-force corps that were at full strength (the ratio was 3 to 1 in our favor), and we had large, widely spread on-the-spot forces which were deployed close to the enemy in the city and on the outer perimeter. The leadership forces at the basic level and the mass political forces were ready.

The campaign command had considered and selected the five most important objectives which we had to take rapidly and at all costs: Tan Son Nhat airfield, the largest remaining air force base of the puppets and the last link by air between Saigon and the outside world, and four other objectives in the city (the puppet Joint General Staff, the presidential palace, the capital district military headquarters, and national police headquarters), all of which were important headquarters units of the war apparatus and the most important "pressure points" on the greatly weakened body of the puppet regime in Saigon. If they lost those five positions, the puppet army would be like a snake that had lost its head. The masses would arise and coordinate with the main-force units. The campaign would conclude rapidly with complete victory.

With regard to fighting methods, the campaign command adopted the policy of, first of all, completely surrounding and isolating the enemy in Saigon and its outskirts, by land, by air, and by sea. Then, in each direction, it would use appropriate forces which were sufficiently strong to surround, divide, and annihilate the enemy on the outside while using an important part of the forces to form strong assault columns of combined combat arms to penetrate deeply, strike directly into the center of the city, and quickly take the five pre-selected objectives. Those forces would then spread out to coordinate with the sapper and commando units, the political security and self-defense forces in the city, and the arising masses, to take the military, political, and economic objectives in the city. Coordinating with the assault columns of the main-force troops, the sapper troops, the commandos, and the on-the-spot armed forces, they would take and hold the bridges, participate in interdicting the airfield and the enemy artillery bases and, along with the uprising masses, attack and take the objectives that have been assigned them and defend the political bases along the paths of advance of the main-force troops.

Faced with our coordinated attacks from the inside and the outside, the enemy could not stop or slow down our advances from the outer perimeter, and would not have time to destroy the large bridges across the Dong Nai and Saigon rivers and the bridges in the other directions. Nor could they form enclaves to defend the other objectives, the tall building, and the densely populated areas in order to, along with their forces within the city, prolong their resistance. The campaign would conclude rapidly and we would limit to the minimum the loss of life and property by the people in the city.

That afternoon the conference heard the representative of the Political General Department discussed the political work plan to be carried out during the Ho Chi Minh Campaign.

In that final strategic war-deciding battle, the political work would play an especially important role. For the first time, a half million of our troops were participating in a campaign, were waging combined-arms combat on a large scale, and would attack the largest city in the South, and the final lair of the enemy. The political work had to enable the entire army to fully understand the strategic decisions of the Political Bureau--to annihilate or rout the enemy's entire army, liberate Saigon, and completely liberate the South--and on that basis create for our whole army a will to fight and win, a spirit of solidarity, and a high degree of unanimity.

The campaign command issued instructions on the political work to each column which clearly stated the significance of the final strategic, war-deciding campaign and the factors of victory of the campaign bearing the name of Uncle Ho, in order to strengthen the responsibility and sense of responsibility and confidence of the cadres and troops, create determination to compete in winning the greatest, most rapid victories, teach a spirit of solidarity and coordination among the units, the armed forces branches, and the combat arms, between the main-force troops and the local troops, between the armed forces and the local party organization and governmental administration, and between the troops and the people. The instructions clearly stated the requirement of

overcoming all instances of hesitation, wavering, relying on firepower, or relying on other units, as well as subjective, simplistic manifestations which may result in regrettable losses, and all manifestations of localism, a lack of modesty, claiming credit, or blaming others. The instructions also stressed the requirement of ensuring the good application of battlefield discipline and the policies, especially the war booty policy, the policy toward wounded soldier and war dead, and the policy toward enemy POW's.

Finally, the representative of the Political General Department read words of encouragement by the Regional Military Commission for the troop, which was attached as an appendage to the instructions on the political work:

"We must plant the Determined-to-Fight-and-Win flag of Uncle Ho above the city bearing his glorious name, to achieve an accomplishment to celebrate his 85th birthday."

We learned that in addition to the political work instructions the front propaganda-training organ widely distributed the "Seven Teachings of Uncle Ho During the General Offensive and Uprising of the Spring of 1968" (37) and his teachings in 1954, when our troops took over management of the cities in the North.

Then followed a report on preparations to provide material-technical support for the campaign.

The representatives of the rear services and technical general departments said that the outstanding point was that even in the process of preparing for the campaign we developed the strength of all three sources of support: aid from the great rear area in the North, on-the-spot rear services, and the full utilization of war booty.

With the consolidation and expansion of the strategic transportation routes east and west of the Truong Son, which ensured truck transportation at high speed, with the oil pipeline that had been extended farther south, with the restoration and use of routes 14 and 1, with the transportation forces and facilities reinforcing the truck units of Command 559, and with the full utilization of sea and air routes, within a brief period of time 100,000 tons of cargo were urgently transported from the great rear area to the battlefield.

After being reinforced with regard to forces, organization, and facilities, regional rear services opened additional corridors in the various directions (to the east: Dong Khanh and Ba Ria, and to the west: Ben Cau, Kien Tuong, and the area north of Route 4). The process of receiving aid from the rear area and mobilizing on-the-spot forces was also a process of creating supply depot systems along the transportation routes. The cadres and men of Regional Rear Services had resourcefully prepositioned thousands of tons of grain and ammunition in guerrilla base areas along the lines of advance to Saigon.. Explosives, weapons, and ammunition were hidden at places in the outskirts, near the enemy airfields, fports, and supply depots, and even within the city, near the important objectives, and were ready for use by the commandoes and sappers.

In the Mekong Delta, eastern Nam Bo, and even the areas around Saigon, in both the liberated areas and the areas still controlled by the enemy, the people contributed manpower and materiel to aid the troops. The nearly 10,000 tons of food that were mobilized on the spot met more than half the needs of the troop columns participating in the campaign. On terrain which was marshy or was intersected by many rivers and canals, to the west, south, and southeast of Saigon, tens of thousands of civilian porters and hundreds of junks, oar-propelled boats, and motorboats were mobilized to serve the campaign.

The war booty captured from the enemy on the Nam Bo battlefield during the rainy season, and the various kinds of technical equipment captured in the Central Highlands and in the central coastal provinces were urgently taken south, which bolstered the equipment of the main-force units, armed forces branches, and technical combat arms participating in the campaign to liberate Saigon.

[13 May 86]

[Text] After concluding his report, the representative of the Rear Services General Department happily said:

"I would like to further report to you that our concern over large-caliber shells is over. We have captured large quantities of shells during the past month, sufficient for the war-deciding battle. That is not to mention the shells we will capture in the process of waging the campaign, or those being sent south by both sea and land to ensure continuous combat if the campaign is prolonged."

The conference exchanged opinions about coordination between the General Staff and the general departments, so that they could work together in monitoring the situation and in helping the upper echelon in providing guidance during the course of the campaign.

Because of the questions that were asked, and because I wanted to take advantage of that fully attended conference, I reported to those in attendance about the situation of the group of High Command cadres who had been sent to the battlefield, and on the use of the air field in the campaign to liberate Saigon.

In addition to the Group A75 cadres who accompanied Dung from the Central Highlands to the B2 front at the beginning of January, in order to help the campaign command guide the work of preparing for combat, the General Staff had just sent another group of cadres to the battlefield. In addition to the sector-leading cadres and those experienced in the work of the General Staff and the general departments, the group included many command cadres of the armed forces branches and combat arms, such as Doan Tue, the artillery commander, Le Xuan Kien, the deputy armor commander, and Nguyen Chi Diem, the sapper commander. (38)

I remember that the day I met with the group and assigned it its mission, Van, on behalf of the Military Commission, spoke of the large scale of the campaign

and the contents that had to be studied in order to truly assist the campaign command with regard to organizing command, the political work, and technical rear services. A campaign on the scale of four or five corps with much technical equipment, attacking the enemy in a large city, required a very high degree of coordination over a large space. A very large number of new problems had been posed which had to be resolved within a very brief period of time, so that the strategic opportunity would not be lost. From moving military equipment and troops on terrain with many rivers, streams, and canals, and providing artillery fire support in many directions, to taking over the management of a city of several million people which had for many years lived under the U.S.-puppet regime, etc., here were many problems which required us to firmly grasp the lines and policies of the party, grasp military science and art, and apply them in each specific circumstance of each combat arm and armed forces branch, in order to help the campaign command in guiding preparations and carrying out the campaign.

Now, before launching the campaign, according to information we had received, the High Command cadre group "practiced as they preached" and, along with the cares of the sectors of the B2 theater, overcame all difficulties and contributed to the work of preparing for the troops to launch the campaign.

The use of combat aircraft before and during the campaign to liberate Saigon was a matter that had been discussed many times by the General Staff and our comrades in the B2 theater, so that we could work together in implementing it. The Navy had worked with the troops of Military Region 5 to brilliantly fulfill the mission of liberating a number of islands in the Spratly Archipelago. How should the air force be used? That question was put up for thought.

Our air force was not large, and during the past several years of combat aircraft had been used primarily to attack enemy aircraft in order to defend the great rear area in the North. But now the situation was different.

On 7 April, Le Ngoc Hien had sent a message informing us that at Nha Trang and Cam Ranh we had captured a number of enemy combat aircraft. He recommended that people be sent south to take them over and study their use. The next day we learned that pilot Lt. Nguyen Thanh Trung, a party member who had operated secretly in the puppet air force, had used an enemy F.5E aircraft to bomb the puppet presidential palace, then had landed safely at the Phuoc Long airfield.

We at the General Staff discussed the matter and agreed to recommend to the Military Commission that since we had liberated many airfields and captured many enemy aircraft, and many air force officers had surrendered, such as the Lt. Col. at Da Nang, we needed to study the use of such pilots to train our pilots, maintain the aircraft, manage the airfields, and use enemy aircraft in the coming campaign. We thought that by taking advantage of the enemy's confusion and using some of their aircraft to attack targets in Saigon, especially Tan Son Nhat, we could greatly affect the morale of the enemy troops.

Tho and Dung were also concerned with that matter. They recommended that

Nguyen Thanh Trung be assigned command of a number of puppet pilots who had joined our ranks to teach our pilots how to use A.37 and F.5E aircraft to attack the enemy. At Da Nang we had captured a number of F.5E aircraft that were still in good condition and could be used to form a squadron which could be used immediately.

After reporting on the matter and receiving approval from the Military Commission, Khanh directed the Air Defense-Air Force Command to send pilots and technical personnel to Da Nang. Within a few days we trained eight pilots and inspected four A.37 aircraft. On 26 April the General Staff sent a command team headed by Le Van Tri, air defense-air force commander, to the Thanh Son airfield to prepare for an A.37 flight to take off within a few days. Meanwhile, at Da Nang we continued to train an A.37 attack squadron and an F.5E fighter squadron, and continued to inspect the remaining aircraft so that they could be brought into use.

Dung and the other comrades there would directly instruct Tri and the forward element of the air defense-air force branch at Thanh Son with regard to selecting the time and targets for using the aircraft. The General Staff sent a radio and a cryptanalyst team so that Tri could communicate with the campaign command.

The General Staff discussed the method of attack with the Air Defense-Air Force Command. In each sortie we needed use only one formation, with a number of aircraft equal to that of the puppet air force. First of all, we would attack the enemy Joint General Staff and Tan Son Nhat airfield. The aircraft would fly at the low altitude of 300 meters to Xuan Loc, then gain altitude for the approach to the targets. After the attack the airplanes would fly north to deceive the enemy, then turn and head back to Thanh Son.

Thus on that day, 27 April, a new, rather bold policy had been taken from, with the agreement of the comrades at the Campaign Command and the General Staff. With their innate intelligence and technical skill, our pilots had quickly learned to fly the enemy aircraft, and were certain to surprise the enemy troops, just as we had surprised the U.S. pilots when they attacked the North several years previously.

During that day's meeting, when speaking of the policy of using enemy aircraft to attack the enemy, I reminded the Operations Department to inform our troops at the front, especially the air-defense units along the coast and in the eastern column, that they should be on the look-out for our aircraft flying south from Phan Rang, and that the Cryptanalysis and Communications Department should be advised to ensure contact with the forward command organs of the air defense-air force branch.

When the meeting concluded, I invited Nguyen Duy Phe, the head of the Cryptanalysis Department, to remain to present a brief report on the work of his department, and especially the duty cryptanalysis team in Zone A. The department had just met to review its work during the past 2 months. I wanted to meet with the duty cryptanalysis and information teams before the campaign began.

Beginning in March, the bureau arranged for the team to work in the office of the Chief of Staff, near the conference room of the Military Commission. Dung was at the front. His office had been left untouched. His large desk, on which a map of Indochina had been spread, was still there. There were still several rows of chairs and maps of the world and Southeast Asia on the wall.

It was afternoon, a Sunday afternoon. Except for the duty offices, there was no one in "Dragon House" area.

When Phe and I arrived the cryptanalysis and communications cadres and personnel were all present. Of the five people in the duty cryptanalysis team, two were women, Dang Thi Muon and Vu Thi Trong. Miss Trong had a small child.

They informed us that their work had been extremely urgent since the Central Highlands campaign began. The messages, always marked "decode immediately," "urgent," "priority 1," and "top urgency," were processed. They never worked 10 hours a day, but 14 hours, 18 hours, or 24-hour duty. The team brought in food so that they could eat on the spot so that they could eat as they worked. Replying to our question, they replied sincerely, "We are tired indeed but are also very happy. News of victories have poured in. The more messages we decode the more enthusiastic we become and the more we forget our fatigue."

I thought to myself, "With regard to the soldiers, who are fighting for noble goals--the independence and freedom of the homeland--news of victories is always a priceless source of inspiration."

The teams' office was just down the hall from the conference room of the Military Commission. During the past several days, as if by custom, every morning vehicles could be seen passing through Gate A, and the leadership comrades of the party and army could be seen entering the middle room. And as if customary, after each meeting, to send messages to the battlefield, messages which contained the collective intelligence of the supreme command--the Political Bureau. the members of the cryptanalysis team had been assigned specific responsibilities, and there was coordination between the duty communication and cryptanalysis personnel, who decoded immediately and sent immediately. The teams' organization and techniques were intended to ensure secrecy, especially in the case of long messages, some of which were 15 to 20 pages long.

Sometimes, when they were decoding messages, they could hear the sound of someone pacing to and from in the corridor. Then the Commander in Chief would walk in and change a word or add a paragraph to the message that was being encoded.

I sat there listening to them speak of their thoughts and work in a very natural, unaffected manner. One comrade related an incident that had occurred a few days previously and had been relayed by the cryptanalysis team with the eastern column.

That day a message had just been received from the "VF 73" station (at Dung's location). The cryptanalysis team decoded the message and took it to Tan,

but was unaware that the message was one which the command of the eastern column was awaiting. Tan exclaimed, "Very good, very good, very timely!" Then he told comrade Vu Van Canh, who had just handed him the message, "Hand me the long book so that I can write a few words."

Canh turned to the last page of the message log book. Tan wrote, "Congratulations to the cryptanalysis and communications comrades. Very timely. Signed--Tan."

I asked, "In the future, what message would you like to decode?"

Practically everyone replied, "The message stating that our troops had planted our flag above 'Independence Place' in Saigon."

I thought to myself that such a desire on everyone's part was truly legitimate.

I reviewed the recent activities of the General Staff which had contributed to the nation's common victory, and the accomplishments of the cryptanalysis teams operating independently to serve the four-party military delegation and the staffs of Dung, Tho, and Tan, as well as the duty cryptanalysis and communications in Zone A, and the requirement to serve guidance and command during the coming campaign. It had to be ensured that the Political Bureau and Military Commission could monitor in a timely manner each step in the development of the columns and each spearhead assaulting the enemy's final lair.

The cordial, brief meeting ended. I happily shook their hands and said, "The message we are waiting for will certainly arise. We are certain to win final victory."

[14 May 66]

[Text] Within only 2 days after our offensive began the enemy's command system, from the Joint General Staff down to the III Corps command, was in disarray. Many leaders of the puppet army and administration evacuated along with the Americans. The fact that Duong Van Minh replaced Tran Van Huong indicated that the puppet political and military systems were about to collapse, but they still hope that they could arrange a "ceasefire."

After listening to the report, the Commander in Chief, on behalf of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission, sent a message encouraging all cadres, party members, and Youth Union members to "heroically advance to win victory for the historic campaign bearing the name of the great Uncle Ho."

The message continued:

"1. The campaign began with smashing victories. We are all very enthusiastic and wish you good health and complete victory.

"2. Remind the staff and political organs of the following: a. In addition

to the combat orders there must be specific directives regarding the missions of each unit and their sphere of responsibility in managing the city; b. Carry out the plan to develop the victory and annihilate and rout the enemy in the Mekong Delta; c. It is necessary to consider in advance the redeployment of forces after the South is completely liberated, especially the readjustments that must be made prior to the rainy season.

"3. After receiving the message you must reply so that we can guide the research organ."

Beginning early in the morning of 29 April, one car after another entered Zone A. The Political Bureau and the Military Commission met to discuss the major tasks that had to be carried out immediately after the complete victory.

In the operations duty room, Khanh and a number of cadres of the operations and intelligence departments nearly all of the time were closely monitoring the hourly changes on the Saigon front. Every time he received new information, Khanh went to the conference room of the Military Commission to report it. An operations cadre usually accompanied him to point out the advances of each column on a map of Saigon that had been spread out on a large table in the conference room.

At about 0900 Ba called in a cadre from the Intelligence Department. He wanted to be briefed on the latest information about the enemy.

It had been learned from the Western radio stations that many more Saigon puppets had fled abroad, including 60 National Assembly delegates, Chief of Staff Cao Van Vien, the recently resigned premier Nguyen Ba Can, etc. In the center of Saigon the evacuation was taking place amid chaos and confusion. After the Tan Son Nhat airfield was bombed and a number of U.S. aircraft carrying out the evacuation were destroyed, the United States had to carry out the evacuation by using helicopters to evacuate people from the roofs of tall buildings in the center of the city, which added to the chaos. The British, Australian, and Japanese radios all spoke of the chaotic atmosphere in Saigon, especially since the afternoon of the 28th. Duong Van Minh met with a number of high-ranking officers remaining in Saigon. More than half of the puppet generals who were invited advocated a cease-fire. The new president tried to save the situation by sending a "government representative" to Tan Son Nhat to meet with our delegation, in hopes of "negotiating a ceasefire." He had high hopes that the meeting would achieve the desired results because "Hanoi probably doesn't have a sufficient administrative apparatus to manage the entire country, so it was very possible that they would agree to a transitional regime." We received information that the enemy had declared a ceasefire.

After exchanging opinions with those present in the conference, Ba read a message which was to be relayed immediately to the battlefield:

"To Sau, Bay, Tuan, and Tu, copy to Tan" (39)

"While the Political Bureau and the Military Commission were meeting we received information that Duong Van Minh had ordered a ceasefire. The

Political Bureau and the Military Commission issue the following directive:

"1. You must order our troops to continue the attack on Saigon in accordance with the plan, to attack with the strongest possible spirit, liberate and occupy all of the city, disarm the enemy troops, dissolve the enemy administrative structure at all levels and completely smash all resistance.

"2. Officially announce that the municipality of Saigon-Gia Dinh will be placed under the authority of the Military Management Committee, of which Gen. Tran Van Tra will serve as chairman.

"3. Other messages will follow. Reply immediately as they are received. Ba"

The message was written at 1000 on 29 April.

That night, during a briefing by the staff, which was attended by Van, we heard Le Huu Duc, head of the Operations Department, report on the over-all situation after 3 continuous days and nights of combat. On the 29th, the situation developed as planned.

During the past 3 days, especially on the 29th, the enemy's resistance had been limited. The common characteristic was that they quickly fell apart, deserted, or surrendered. The actual situation has shown that the enemy's command system was in a state of chaos and was no longer effective. The puppet administrative apparatus, especially at the basic level, had collapsed. The evacuation of the Americans and their lackeys was being carried out with the greatest urgency and was about to conclude!

The columns in all directions had received orders from the campaign command to change over to the general attack into the city's center, coordinate their assaults directly into the center of the city, and take the preselected objectives.

When we were listening to the report, a cryptanalyst knocked and requested permission to enter with a message that had just been received.

Tan reported that orders had been given to two corps to attack into the center of the city beginning at 0400 on the following morning, 30 April.

Van spoke with Ba by telephone. Then a message was sent to Dung:

"We and Ba see that the situation in the various directions is developing favorably. The more rapidly Tan's column advances the better."

A message was also sent to Tan:

"You must act on Tuan's directive regarding time. If Tuan does not issue a directive, you must advance as rapidly as possible. The specific hour must depend on the situation.

The messages were sent from the operations duty office at 2215 on 29 April.

That night, Cao Van Khanh slept in the duty operations office. Around midnight, after listening to a report by the Intelligence Department, he telephoned me. After we exchanged opinions, he informed our comrades at the front that information had been received that at one minute after midnight on 30 April the enemy ordered the naval vessels at Can Tho, Dong Tam, and Phu Quoc to concentrate at a certain point (location unknown), and a number of ships (the initial information indicated eight ships) to prepare to proceed to Guam. Previously we had learned that 78 enemy aircraft had been transferred to Utapao. It was not yet known whether that was the first transfer. "This is for you information. The units must be ordered to monitor the situation and find out whether the naval vessels are carrying troops. There must be a plan to attack them in a timely manner."

Early in the morning of 30 April, Ba, Truong Chinh, and Dung went to the "Dragon House." Van was also present. The other members of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission arrived later.

After listening to Khanh's report, those in attendance exchanged opinions and evaluated the situation. At about 0800 a message from the Political Bureau and the Military Commission was completed and was encoded and sent:

"We ardently praise all units which have achieved great merit during recent days, smashed the defensive units and defensive strongpoints to the east, north, northwest, and southwest, cut Route 4, attacked the large enemy airfields, and operated well in the outskirts of Saigon and within the city.

"The Political Bureau and the Military Commission appeal for all cadres, enlisted men, party members, and Youth Union members to, with the greatest possible determination, quickly advance directly into the final lair of the enemy with the strongest spirit of an ever-victorious army, smash all enemy resistance, combine attacks with uprisings, and completely liberate Saigon-Gia Dinh. We must maintain strict discipline, fully carry out and directives and orders, protect the lives and property of the people, manifest our army's revolutionary tradition and nature, and brilliantly fulfill the mission of winning complete victory for the historic campaign bearing the name of the great Uncle Ho.

"The Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee reminds the regional military commission and command about managing the city. It is necessary to continue to develop the victory and annihilate and disintegrate the remaining enemy forces in the other areas, especially in the Mekong Delta and on Con Son and Phu Quoc islands, mobilize an absolute revolutionary spirit and fight continuously until final victory is won, and overcome all manifestations of being satisfied and wanting to slow down. In order to continue to develop the victory immediately after the liberation of Saigon, the Military Commission emphasizes the necessity to prepare Tan Son Nhat airfield so that our air force can be used in the new plan. The Air Defense-Air Force Command has prepared two companies of A.37 pilots at Phan Rang. The Mig units have also been instructed to prepare to take off when ordered."

The meeting of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission continued:

At 1000, comrade Nguyen Thanh, head of Office 70 (40) rushed in to report Radio Japan had announced the liberation, that the first tanks were advancing into Saigon.

I recommended that we pause for a few minutes to listen to reports on the situation. Khanh was invited in to brief us. He had practically no sleep.

He reported that the members of the campaign command had assigned an additional mission to 3rd Corps: when advancing into Tan Son Nhat airfield it was to send a column to advance in the direction the puppet Joint General Staff and coordinate with 1st Corps. Since midnight the deep-penetration units had urgently carried out their orders to advance rapidly and break through directly to the objectives that had been assigned them, bypassing the other objectives along the way in order to accelerate their rate of advance.

The evacuation of Americans, which had taken place on a large scale since the afternoon of 29 April, had concluded at daybreak with the flight of Ambassador Martin, who departed Saigon at 0445.

According to information that had been received that morning, the 10th Division of 3rd Corps was advancing toward the Bay Hien intersection and the columns of 1st Corps were attacking the bases at Lai Khe, Phu Loi, and Lai Thieu and were developing in the direction of Go Vap. Another column was attacking the enemy from Binh Phuoc bridge to Binh Trieu bridge. After smashing the enemy resistance at Ho Nai and Tam Hiep, 4th Corps was attacking the headquarters of the puppet III Corps and was preparing to penetrate into Saigon. The deep-penetration units of 2nd Corps was crossing the highway bridge across the Dong Nai River and had wiped out pockets of enemy resistance at Thu Duc and north of Rach Chiec bridge. To the south and southwest, the forward units of Group 232 were advancing in the direction of the Capital Special Zone headquarters and the puppet's national police headquarters. On Route 4, we had taken the Thu Thua subsector and liberated the city of Tan An.

In order to prepare for the deep-penetration columns of the main-force troops that would advance into the city, between 27 and 29 April the sapper and commando units had attacked and taken the large bridges, repulsed many enemy counterattacks, and defended the bridges. We had to take some of the bridges--such as the Rach Chiec and Binh Phuoc bridges--from the enemy two or three times. Previously, about 10 days before the end of April, Gia Dinh regiments 1 and 2 had stepped up their activities. They had attacked the Phu Lam radar station, sent forces close to Tan Son Nhat airfield to the north, coordinated with the sappers in taking and holding the Rach Chiec and Bien Hoa highway bridges, and taken troops to the vicinity of the objectives in accordance with the plan to coordinate the columns and directions. After coordinating with the main-force units to liberate routes 25 and 19 and the Nhon Trach and Thanh Tuy Ha areas, the Bien Hoa armed forces had attacked south to liberate and take over the objectives in Duyen Hai District, a remote district on the coast.

When the first units of the eastern column entered Saigon via the Newport Bridge, large numbers of people poured out onto the street along their path of

advance to welcome our troops. Many domestic and foreign correspondents filmed and photographed our troops advancing into the center of the city. To the north, the local armed forces liberated the Chau Thanh and Di An subsectors and district seats, and forced the enemy troops in the Song Than base to surrender. With the support of the armed forces, the people in the villages and hamlets arose, eliminated the enemy administration, and set up a self-management administration.

In the outskirts and within the city, when our troops were about to enter the people in many places, under the guidance of the revolutionary bases and the commando forces, coordinated their uprisings. During the night of 29 April, in many subprecincts and precincts the masses took over enemy military posts and administrative officers, and took over control of the subprecincts and hamlets. In Tay Nhi Subprecinct (now Subprecinct 12) in Phu Nhuan Precinct, which bordered on the puppet's Joint General Staff, the revolutionary flag flew from the subprecinct headquarters beginning at noon on 29 April. The self-defense forces and masses of Binh Thoi Subprecinct in Precinct 11 hamlets 5 and 6 that night, and the masses in Khanh Hoi Subprecinct arose to take the police subsector and control the subprecinct.

The General Staff had just received recent information from a number of provinces in the Mekong Delta.

After the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee listened to reports and exchanged opinions on the situation and the most urgent problems Van, on behalf of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission, sent a message stating that "A number of matters have been agreed upon so that you can promptly implement them:

"1. The Military Management Committee is to immediately announce the first its contents are that: a. The liberation forces are advancing into the city to liberate Saigon-Gia Dinh and complete the great undertaking of liberating the South; b. The army of the puppet Saigon regime must immediately put down its arms and surrender; c. An appeal must be made for the people to arise and, along with Liberation Army, smash all enemy resistance, maintain order and security, protect the lives and property of the people, and complete the great undertaking of completely liberating our beloved South Vietnam.

"2. Preparations to use the air force have been reviewed. The Mig 17 and Mig 21 units are ready. If truly necessary, they will be used according to plan."

A half hour after the message was sent the Intelligence Department reported that the Western radio stations had carried news that our troops had entered the puppet presidential palace.

Another urgent message was sent to the South which expressed the opinion of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission: "Duong Van Minh may be used to appeal for the enemy units to lay down their arms, not with the status of a president but only with the status of a person who has crossed over to the ranks of the people."

The message repeated the news that our troops had planted our flag above

"Independence Palace," and concluded with the sentence "The members of the Political Bureau are very, very happy."

FOOTNOTES

1. The theater extending from Military Region 6 to Nam Bo.
2. Comrade Le Duc Tho, a member of the Political Bureau of the VCP Central Committee.
3. Comrade Le Duan, General Secretary of the VCP Central Committee.
4. Comrade Vo Nguyen Giap, a member of the Political Bureau of the VCP Central Committee, Secretary of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, and Minister of National Defense.
5. Before withdrawing its troops, the United States sent to the South nearly 700 aircraft of all kinds, 500 artillery pieces, 400 tanks and armored vehicles, and many warships, and intended to send, in addition, a large quantity of technical military equipment and increase the puppet army's reserves of war materiel to a rather high level: nearly 2 million tons.
6. A province in northeast Cambodia.
7. A province in northeast Cambodia.
8. The Command of the Truong Son forces (Group 559).
9. The campaign in Loc Ninh, Binh Long, and along Route 13 in 1972.
10. The Central Highlands theater.
11. Consisting of nearly all provinces in the Mekong Delta.
12. The first session of the 21st Plenum of the VCP Central Committee was held at the end of June; its resolution was officially approved in October 1973.
13. Cai Lay, the area south of Route 4 (liberated 20 July 1963).
14. Consisting of the provinces of Can Tho, Rach Gia, Soc Trang, and Ca Mau.
15. Ba used the term "Armee fleche" to express that idea.
16. The Central Team, consisting of a number of cadres from the Operations Departments, the combat arms, the armed forces branches, the Military Institute, etc., was formed in 1974 to assist in studying the strategic plan.
17. According to the enemy's geographical organization, Military Region 1 (i.e. Tactical Zone 1) consisted of the provinces from Quang Tri to Quang

Ngai; Military Region 2 (i.e. Tactical Zone 2) consisted of the provinces from Binh Dinh to Khanh Hoa, Binh Thuan, and the Central Highlands; Military Region 3 (i.e. Tactical Zone 3) consisted of the provinces of eastern Nam Bo; and Military Region 4 (i.e. Tactical Zone 4) consisted of the provinces in the Mekong Delta, Saigon, and the surrounding area, which the enemy had organized into the Capital Special Zone.

18. Military Region 5.

19. "Chien" was a pseudonym of comrade Vo Nguyen Giap, and "Tuan" a pseudonym of comrade Van Tien Dung, during the general offensive and uprising of the spring of 1975.

20. A local slang word in Military Region 5, meaning to work in the old way, slowly and sluggishly.

21. The Tri Thien Military Region

22. The forces of the Route 9 Front (northern Quang Tri), at that time in western Tri Thien-Hue.

23. During the latter part of March, Group 559 shifted over to Route 14 3 military engineer regiments and 3 anti-aircraft regiments, and sent 5 military engineer companies to Play Cu and Cong Tum.

24. That is, the plan to send most of the B3 forces to eastern Nam Bo, while expanding the liberated areas in the lowlands of Military Region 5 with the existing forces and adding the 968th Division and technical military equipment.

25. That is, agreement on the first alternate plan.

26. 3rd Corps was formed on 27 March 1975 and was commanded by Vu Lang. Dang Vu Hiep served as political officer.

27. After the meeting of 25 March, the Political Bureau on the 28th assigned Le Duc Tho to the B2 theater, along with Pham Hung and Van Tien Dung, to directly represent the Political Bureau in guiding the campaign to liberate Saigon.

28. Consisting of the provinces of southernmost Trung Bo.

29. On 27 April Cu Lao Thu was liberated.

30. One of our comrades planted in the enemy air force.

31. By 29 April we had taken all islands occupied by the puppet army on the Spratley Archipelago, such as Namyit Island, Sand Cay, Sinh Ton, and Amboy Cay.

32. That is, the resolution of 29 March 1975 on the localities preparing for self-liberation by using their own forces when the opportunity arose.

33. During the night of 27 April Route 4 was completely cut at Tan Hiep, Trung Luong, Long Dinh, Cai Lay, and Cai Be.

34. The headquarters of Dong Si Nguye, commander of Group 559, was then at Quy Nhon.

35. FULRO was a reactionary organization in the guise of "allied forces to liberate the oppressed races," which had been formed by the French and later used by the Americans to divide the ethnic groups and sabotage the revolution.

36. The team was formed in March 1974 to help the Military Commission study the strategic operations plan. It was now supplemented by a number of cadres of the operations, intelligence, military manpower, staff, and rear services departments, the Military Science Institute, and a number of combat arms and armed forces branches, to help study and recommend fighting methods in the campaign to liberate Saigon. The team was headed by Cao Van Khanh, deputy chief of staff.

37. Will must be resolute; plans must be very meticulous; control must be very tight; coordination must be very smooth; the execution of orders must be thorough; cadres must be very exemplary; absolute secrecy must be maintained.

38. Quang Hung, deputy commander of the air defense-air force branch; Hoang Niem, deputy commander of the communications branch; and Phan Khac Hy deputy commander of Group 559.

39. That is, Le Duc Tho, Pham Hung, Van Tien Dung, Tran Van Tra, and Le Trong Tan.

40. Office 70 of the Intelligence Department was responsible for monitoring the enemy by the use of technical facilities.

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DATE FILMED

August 14, 1987

D.S.